The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

JUNE 50¢ 1963

32 EXTRA PAGES

a new detective novelet

RUFUS KING

The Gods, To Avenge . . .

an "impossible crime" novelet

HUGH PENTECOST

The Day the Children Vanished

Borden Deal
Theodore Sturgeon
Kenneth L. Roberts
Robert L. Fish

first new

ROY VICKERS

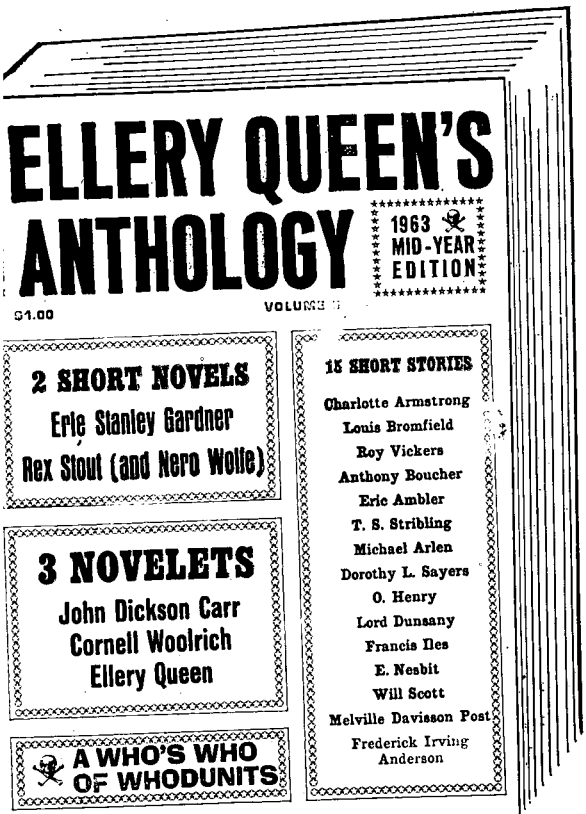
Dept. of Dead Ends novelet in 5 years—

The Color of Truth

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NOW ON SALE

The new
ELLERY QUEEN's 1963 ANTHOLOGY
MID-YEAR EDITION



This newest edition of the world's finest mysteries is now on sale.

Here is your opportunity to order your copies today.

Look at the line-up of authors on the left—you won't want to miss reading a single story.

Use the coupon below—copies will be rushed to you—and you will soon enjoy the most suspenseful fiction you've ever read.

ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY / 505 PARK AVENUE / NEW YORK 22, N. Y

Please send me _____ copies of ELLERY QUEEN'S 1963 ANTHOLOGY—Mid-Year Edition No. 5

I am enclosing $1 for each copy ($1.25 outside U.S.A.).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

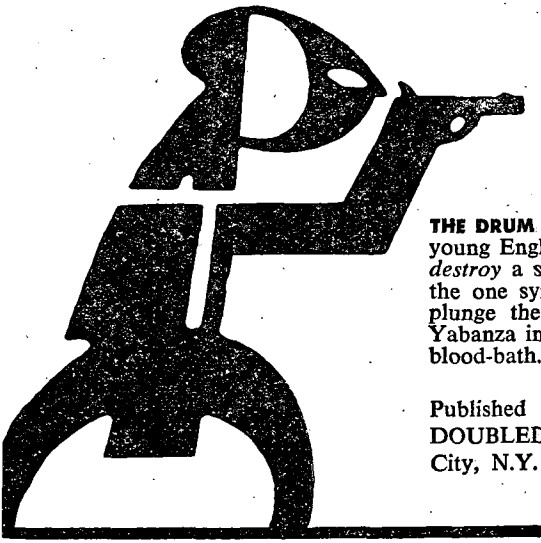
CRÈME DE LA CRIME

THE DOUBLY DEAD • *E. X. Ferrars.* The lady vanishes . . . and the only clues are perplexingly paradoxical—ashes without fire; flowers that don't wilt; and an open milk bottle no human hands could have touched. $3.50

LION IN WAIT • *Dorothy Gardiner.* Sheriff Moss Magill of Notlaw, Colorado (population 390) copes with a beatnik art colony, a three-ring circus, and a gentle lion falsely accused of murder. $3.50

MURDER'S LITTLE HELPER • *George Bagby.* Evelyn was young, pretty, pregnant, and dead. Just a routine New York suicide, till Homicide's Inspector Schmidt puts one and one together—and comes up with murder. $3.50

NO. 9 BELMONT SQUARE • *Margaret Erskine.* An aging Hungarian tenor issues a dramatic television plea to his long-lost love. A case for Inspector Septimus Finch develops when this romantic gesture turns an eccentric English boarding-house into a hotbed of intrigue and murder. $3.95



DEATH AND CIRCUMSTANCE • *Hillary Waugh.* Two escaped convicts and one dangerously frustrated woman form a strange and ruthless triumvirate—and lead Connecticut Police Chief Fred C. Fellows to the deadliest case of his career. $3.50

THE DRUM OF UNGARA • *Bill Knox.* A young Englishman struggles to find *and destroy* a sacred African tribal drum—the one symbolic weapon which could plunge the newly formed republic of Yabanza into a senseless and terrifying blood-bath. $3.95

Published for the **CRIME CLUB** by DOUBLEDAY & CO., INC., Garden City, N.Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW LONDON HOUSE MYSTERIES—

P. M. Hubbard
"FLUSH AS MAY"
A fresh, uncommonly well-written story by a writer who is a newcomer to the world of crime.
$3.50

Bruce Graeme
"THE UNDETECTIVE"
A highly diverting tale, worked out in stunning detail, of a crime author who "ghosts" his own work and gets into more than he bargained for.
$3.50

Both books obtainable at
THE BRITISH BOOK CENTRE
122 East 55th St.
New York 22, N. Y.
or at your favorite bookstore.

Detach coupon and mail today.

THE BRITISH BOOK CENTRE
122 E. 55th St., N. Y. 22, N. Y.

Please put my name on your mailing list to receive information on new British mysteries.

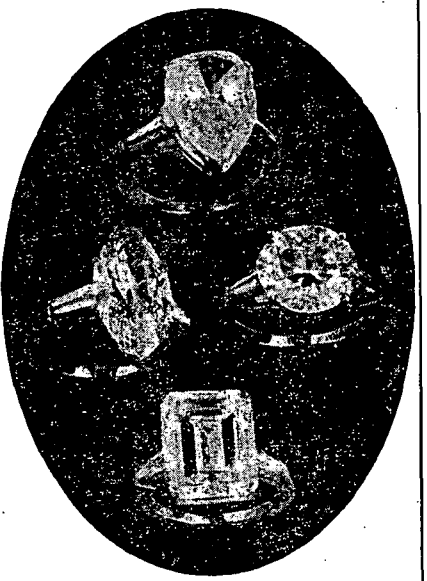
Name_____

Street_____

City_____

Zone_____ State_____

The Diamond of Your Dreams
at a price you can afford



You can now buy diamond jewelry by mail direct from one of America's well known diamond cutters. Save from 1/4 to 1/2 and wear the diamonds for 10 days without payment or obligation. This new way of buying diamonds is the talk of the country.

Send for **FREE 72-PAGE CATALOG.**

Over 5,000 styles $100 to $100,000
EMPIRE DIAMOND CORP., DEPT. 79
Empire State Bldg., New York 1, N. Y.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

.....

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Not Bad.

The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

***including* BLACK MASK MAGAZINE**

10 editions: U.S.A., Australian, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese

3 DETECTIVE NOVELETTES

THE COLOR OF TRUTH — *Roy Vickers* — 6
THE GODS, TO AVENGE . . . — *Rufus King* — 75
THE DAY THE CHILDREN VANISHED — *Hugh Pentecost* — 137

BLACK MASK MAGAZINE

TOUGH COP — *Borden Deal* — 118

DETECTIVE AND CRIME STORIES

OPERATION BONAPARTE — *James M. Ullman* — 25
ONLY THE FIRST READING — *Raleigh Bond* — 39
GREASE JOB — *Gary Jennings* — 44
ADVENTURE OF THE COUNTERFEIT SOVEREIGN — *Robert L. Fish* — 67
THE SHAKEN HEART — *Paul W. Fairman* — 99
CONCEALED EVIDENCE — *Herbert Harris* — 115
THE ABOMINABLE HOUSE GUEST — *Theodore Sturgeon* — 130

EQMM "FIRST STORY"

THE MIRACLE ON FIFTH AVENUE — *Olga Marx* — 106

DEPARTMENT OF FAMOUS LITERARY FIGURES

THE BOTTLE MINE — *Kenneth L. Roberts* — 58

MYSTERY HARDCOVERS OF THE MONTH — 43
MYSTERY PAPERBACKS OF THE MONTH — 43
BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH — *Anthony Boucher* — 105
INDEX TO VOLUME FORTY-ONE — 162

PUBLISHER: *B. G. Davis* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 41, No. 6, Whole No. 235, JUNE, 1963. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc. at 50¢ a copy. Annual subscription $6.00 in U.S.A. and possessions and Canada; $7.00 in the Pan American Union; $7.00 in all other countries. Publication Office, 10 Ferry St., Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 505 Park Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions, and other mail items are to be sent to 505 Park Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Second-Class postage paid at Concord, N. H. *© 1963 by Davis Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. Printed in U.S.A. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.*

JOEL DAVIS, *Assistant Publisher* PAUL W. FAIRMAN, *Managing Editor*
MELVIN FLAMM, *Business Manager* CONSTANCE DI RIENZO, *Executive Editorial Secretary*
FRANK TAGGART, *Art Director*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GOOD NEWS: *The first new Department of Dead Ends story in 5 years! . . .*

BETTER NEWS: *and this new DDE novelette is first-rate—an excellent example of Roy Vickers' technique by which he projects the events leading up to the tragedy so realistically, and the events leading up to the solution so convincingly, that again you will think you are reading the facts in a true case . . .*

BEST NEWS: *and, most exciting of all, Mr. Vickers has promised that this novelette will be the first of a new series about the never-say-die, elephant-memoried DDE . . .*

Welcome back, Department of Dead Ends—welcome home!

THE COLOR OF TRUTH

by ROY VICKERS

IT IS UNREASONABLE TO CALL A MURder successful merely because the murderer cannot be apprehended. No sane man plans a murder only to escape detection. He plans to alter the pattern of his own life—for his own future enjoyment—and the murder is but a troublesome and dangerous preliminary. By a murderer's scale of values, he owes it to his victim to have a good time on the proceeds.

Harry Finchmoor failed to have a good time even when the money rolled in and the "unsolved mystery" was comfortably tucked away in the Department of Dead Ends—and it was this failure which led to his undoing.

The murder had been occasioned by the victim, John Chester Brendwright, playing dog-in-the-manger with nearly a square mile of poor agricultural land which had suddenly acquired a high industrial value. There was no "dirty work" in the deal. If Brendwright had been as ready as Finchmoor and the rest to make a large and legitimate profit, he would not have been murdered.

The murder, clumsy enough in itself, was covered with some ingenuity, but Finchmoor can hardly be credited with this. He lurched along a path paved by the personality of his victim. It was as if Brendwright had plotted to get himself murdered.

Brendwright was close to seven

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ty, unmarried, his only relation was a niece who lived in London. He was entitled to call himself Colonel but refused because the Army had offended him. For three centuries his family had owned this comparatively poor estate situated at Thaleham, a village some forty miles from the edge of London. A crank and a dreamer, he pictured himself as the ideal landlord, loving the land for its own sake.

A landlord he certainly was, but on a time leash. At the death of his father he had been unable to meet the duties. He was compelled to sell the land—but contrived to cling to it. He sold it below its low value—on the condition that he should remain tenant for life. The purchaser was a London businessman, then resident in the neighborhood—Harry Finchmoor's father.

When Finchmoor senior died, Harry inherited the family business in London and the title deeds to all the land at Thaleham except the manor house which Brendwright had retained. Harry would step into complete ownership on Brendwright's death. While Brendwright was alive, neither could sell a square foot of the land without the other's consent.

When the big chance came, Brendwright refused his consent.

Harry Finchmoor did not know that the big chance had come until the niece, Lorna Brendwright, rang him at his office.

"Lorna Brendwright here. Harry, can I talk to you about Uncle John?"

"Lorna!" He was embarrassed. "First, tell me how are you."

"That's civil of you, Harry, but it's about Uncle John. May I come to your office?"

"Lunch would be nicer. What about the Besc Chinar?"

In their teens at Thaleham he had adored her—until she repulsed him and in no gentle manner. There had been no resentment, only a hangfire shock to his self-esteem. He had no craving to see her again. For ten years he preserved the memory of her as she was when she was living with her mother at Rose Cottage—it could not escape that name, there really were roses round the door.

Was she as good-looking as he had thought her? He was still uncertain when they met in the restaurant. He noted that she was dressed with a disciplined femininity that suggested a good office background.

"You still look like a tennis star," she greeted him. "Why have you avoided me?"

"I was once fool enough to fancy my chances, Lorna."

Lorna tended to take that kind of remark at its face value.

"You mean that day when we were on a wander? You were showing me an outworked gravel pit when you suddenly grabbed me. I was frightened."

"Not half as frightened as I was.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I'm glad you told me. Now I shall enjoy my lunch." He added, "Is your uncle ill?"

"I don't know. He says the doctor told him he can't live another two years. It's not the way doctors generally talk." She spoke with indifference, and then: "Harry! Graun Limited intend to set up a factory at Thaleham. They will want housing for two thousand families. Semi-detached houses with gardens. A square mile of them."

The Big Chance. Ushered in by Lorna, as if she intended to take charge. He held back the obvious qustions until he had ordered lunch.

"Yesterday," resumed Lorna, "was my birthday. Uncle John always comes up to London and takes me out to dinner. We talk about his land, ignoring the fact that it's really your land." Her voice had a pleasing tone but she spoke as if to a younger brother. "He then gives me five pounds which he cannot afford and which I do not need. As we part, he takes me by both hands —very awkward because my bag always gets in the way—and reminds me that all that he has will one day be mine—which means the manor house, mortgaged to the hilt, which is all he owns."

He could barely listen. "Why didn't they approach me first?"

"Please!" Lorna did not like to be interrupted. "Last night the land talk was wilder. I was offered the story of King George III staying at the manor house to learn about farming from Uncle's ancestor. In time he told me that a man from the County Council had informed him that the Council intended to welcome the factory and to facilitate the building program. If necessary, the Council would itself step in under the Compulsory Purchase Act."

"Compulsory Purchase!" Harry repeated. That was a blow and she was playing it up. Her old game of trying to lead him. But he was older now and could take care of himself. "That means his tenancy and my land would be bought at agricultural valuation. And the Council would build the houses for Graun's."

"That will happen," she said, "unless you can give guarantees—within one month—that the houses will be built by private enterprise. The Council will send you a sort of ultimatum in a few days."

His spirits rose. Lorna, he supposed, knew nothing of the mechanism of high finance. "I can get a financial company to come in and fix the whole thing."

"But, Harry, you can't do anything at all to that land without Uncle's consent. And he won't give it. He loves not giving it. He says he'll be dead before the houses can be built and while he's alive he intends to be loyal to his land. And I shall get the manor house and the mortgage. You see, I'm not wholly disinterested."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Leave it to me, Lorna." To soften it he added, "Your uncle doesn't understand that I shall buy back the tenancy from him—at a substantial profit to himself."

She gave him the look that had intimidated him in his teens.

"Rose Cottage!" she exclaimed. "It needed repair when we were there. It's much worse now. Well, he has scraped together fifty pounds to start restoring—"

"Surely, we need not bother about Rose Cottage—"

"Harry! Do you remember the elaborate set-up he ordered for mother's funeral? His 'kinswoman,' of course. Yesterday he said that as soon as the cottage was restored he wanted *mother and me* to live in it again."

"Momentary absent-mindedness."

"No. It's dissociation—it's been creeping on him for at least a year. He cannot wholly distinguish between his dream of himself and the real life going on around him. I don't think he fully realizes that he has signed away his ownership of that land."

"Then I'll show him his own signature. The title deeds, correspondence, and whatnot are at the Safe Deposit. I'll get 'em out after lunch. I'll go down by rail—so's I can sort out the papers in the train."

"I hope he will listen to you," she said, but without conviction. Her doubt of his ability stung him to boastfulness.

"He must. I'll drench him in money talk—offer him a juicy cut. He can't be so mad as to throw it away for the love of talking tosh about his ancestors. It'll be all right, Lorna."

In the train he was less cocksure of his ability to knock sense into the old man. But the nearest he came to planning murder was to weigh up what the doctor was alleged to have said. If Brendwright could not live for two years, for how much less would he live? Twenty-three months less than two years? Nothing else would be any good.

He opened the deedbox he had brought from the Safe Deposit, separated the Thaleham papers from other interests, and put his selections on top. A bundle of stodge, but he would do his best.

His thoughts returned to Lorna. It was tactful of her to say she had been frightened that day when he had grabbed her in the outworked gravel pit and fumbled a kiss. But in fact she had not been frightened. She had been amused. In ten years he had not forgotten her amusement. But now, of course—

At Thaleham the stationmaster-porter greeted him as an old acquaintance and immediately spoke of the proposed factory.

"I hear say that Mr. Brendwright is against it—though he needs the money as much as anybody. It'll be a shame if Thaleham gets left out again."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It isn't so easy to stop a thing as big as this, Mr. Hawkins."

"Ah!" Hawkins eyed the deedbox as if it were a doctor's bag. "I hope you've got a cure for his trouble in there, Mr. Harry."

Very encouraging! The whole countryside wanted the factory. Carrying the deedbox awkwardly by one of the side handles, he stepped out on the five-minute walk through the village, passing Rose Cottage, which now suggested only decay.

As he entered the drive of the manor house he came on Brendwright, pushing a barrow. He had not aged unduly—in fact, he looked good for another ten years, though the barrow was making him puff.

"Ha!" He glared at his visitor. "Don't tell me. I knew you at once. You're young Harry Finchmoor."

"Correct. I hope you are well, Mr. Brendwright."

"I *look* well, don't I!" He drew himself up, posing. "My doctor could tell you a different tale. Never mind that. I expect you've heard about this wildcat scheme to turn my land into a filthy slum."

"My" land! Finchmoor let it pass. His offer to push the barrow to its shed was declined. Brendwright washed his hands at an outside tap, dried them on sacking. He opened the front door with a latchkey of modern type.

The house had the air of having slunk unobserved into the Twentieth Century, achieving a bedraggled character of its own. It had sixteen rooms but Brendwright had his on the ground floor—assisted, three days a week, by a woman from the next village. In the hall a huge sideboard sustained a telephone and a silver tray on which a single letter awaited posting.

"Miss-is *Har*butt!" It was a parade-ground bellow that startled Finchmoor, but the next words were an ingratiating plea. "Will you please serve tea for two?"

The one-time dining room, now an all-purpose living room, had kept its massive table that could have seated thirty. Beside an Eighteenth Century fireplace hung a Victorian bell-rope whose tassel touched an almost-new radio set. A Louis XV escritoire, a set of carved footstools, and a gilt settee cohabited with one armchair and four cane-backed uprights.

They stood in a bow window, looking over the land that had grown corn, passed to mixed farming, then to market gardening, and now was no more than pasture. The fading light of an October afternoon dealt kindly with the remains of the farm buildings.

"All sorts and conditions of men have stood where we are standing now, Young Harry. Poets—preachers — generals — admirals — statesmen. Why even royalty—Geoge III had the intelligence to study farming. Did I ever tell you?"

"I think not, sir. I'd like to hear the yarn if you feel inclined."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Finchmoor was ready to let him blow off steam.

Mrs. Harbutt came in with the tea. She set down the tray, switched on the lights, drew the curtains, then interrupted the story of George III.

"It's just on five now, sir, and I'll be going if there's nothing else you want. I've made a cottage pie out of what was left of the joint—for your luncheon tomorrow. Remember to light the gas in good time and it'll be nice and hot. And there's plenty o' bits an' pieces to carry you over to Thursday morning."

"Thank you, Mrs. Harbutt." Again the ingratiating tone. "Will you please post the letter on the hall table?" To Finchmoor he added, "Rose Cottage. I've just written an order to start restoring it."

Rose Cottage, at worst, was better than George III. After tea Finchmoor managed to reach bedrock. Brendwright took the armchair, and Finchmoor one of the uprights. Between them on the floor was the deedbox. Finchmoor unlocked it and arranged his papers on the inside of the lid.

First was a handwritten letter of several sheets.

"You wrote this to my father, Mr. Brendwright. Your deal with him was based on that letter."

Brendwright regarded the letter with admiration. "Handwriting firm as a rock. And legible."

"I'd like you to reread it, please, Mr. Brendwright. It will remind you of your general position in regard to the land. I have brought with me the documents, abstracts, and correspondence."

"I remember it all as if it were yesterday." Glowing with good humor he returned the letter. "The general position, as you say. I went into all that with the man from the Council." He chuckled elaborately. "I was very polite to him, Young Harry. I told him I would give earnest consideration, see my lawyer, and explore every avenue."

"Splendid." Finchmoor was puzzled. "There's nearly a month—"

"Nearly a month? You haven't heard the rest of it. My lawyer tells me it takes a full year to obtain a compulsory purchase order, even when there's no opposition. And there's going to be plenty of opposition. I shall conduct my own case. With one point after another I can keep it hanging about the High Court for two or three years. The factory people can't wait all that time. They'll build their precious factory somewhere else."

So that was what the chuckle had meant. Finchmoor felt himself cornered. By the time he had paced the room and come to rest on the hearthrug he had decided to damp down on diplomacy.

"In a few days, Mr. Brendwright, that man will approach me—"

"Then he'll be wasting his time. Nothing can be done with my land as long as my tenancy continues. They'll have to break that up, first."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Suppose we break it up ourselves, Mr. Brendwright? You and I as partners. I could get a financial company to build these houses for Graun's."

"I don't follow you, Young Harry." It was a growl but Finchmoor ignored it.

"Then we'll start at the other end. As of today you own this house and garden—marginally. Nothing else of the estate—not even Rose Cottage. Forgive me for suggesting that you must have many financial anxieties. Join hands with me and you will enjoy a comfortable retirement."

"Retirement from what?" demanded Brendwright.

"From the misery of squeezing a bare living out of this land. For your life tenancy you paid my father two thousand pounds in the form of reduced purchase price. I will pay you two thousand the day you surrender the tenancy to me. Further, I will allot to you one-fifth of the shares allotted to me by the financing company. Wait, please!" He broke off as Brendwright rose from his chair. "Tell me your objections when you've heard what you're objecting to. I don't know what your share will be worth. You can be reasonably certain that it won't be less than ten thousand pounds and it might well be substantially more. This land has become a little gold mine—"

Finchmoor's voice sank as he saw that he was getting nowhere. The big chance was slithering into the mud. He was failing. Lorna would again be amused.

"So I am to hand my land over to the hucksters and take my thirty pieces of silver!" There was hatred in the old man's eyes—he was goading himself into fury. On the off chance that Mrs. Harbutt might still be available to create a diversion, Finchmoor pulled the Victorian bell-rope.

The full length of the bell-rope came away in his hand.

"Clown! Get out of my house—d'you hear, get out! And take your lawyer's bag o' tricks with you."

Brendwright kicked the deedbox, spilling the contents.

Then he turned his back.

Finchmoor looped the bell-rope.

Little gold mine or not, it was the animal violence of kicking the deedbox that had sparked an explosive mixture of emotions in Finchmoor.

The hysteria passed when part of him became certain that Brendwright was dead. Emotionally exhausted, Harry stood erect, stretched himself, and yawned as if waking from sleep.

He dropped into an armchair and lit a cigarette.

I've killed a man ran his thoughts. Lorna was right—hell, Lorna didn't say I was to kill him. I did it myself and I don't feel any of the things I ought to feel. I must be a pretty low type, and the most

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ghastly fool. What's the next step? Pretend I didn't do it. How? Who benefits by this man's death? I do. Where were you at six o'clock yesterday? They wouldn't need any clues.

Before the cigarette was finished he was making a sober assessment of his position. If he felt no remorse he certainly felt no panic—it was all too stark for panic. Time—place—motive—those were the three rocks. The hour of death could be revealed by the corpse—but not after the lapse of a few days. Therefore he must conceal the corpse for a few days. That would cover "place"—and he need not deny that he was at the manor house at six. So "time" was all right.

Blueprint for getting away with murder.

He might be caught in the act of moving the corpse. But he would certainly be caught if he did not move the corpse. And that would apply to every act. Therefore: take risks cheerfully and bluff that everything was going according to plan.

Bluff everybody—including Lorna. Better to start on Lorna at once, before his nerve failed. He hurried to the telephone in the hall.

"Harry speaking from the manor house. It's all right, Lorna. Your uncle has accepted the terms I offered and will surrender the tenancy at once—I'm to see the lawyers tomorrow." He waited while she expressed somewhat guarded congratulations. The bluff must be heated up. "Would you like to say a word to him—tell him you're pleased?"

"I will, if you think it advisable."

"Hang on while I ask him." He put down the receiver noisily and ". . . Nothing doing. Your uncle said he's too tired."

"Did he? It's very unlike him to admit it."

"It was a bit of a shake-up for him. For me, too—but I thought you'd like to know at once."

Lorna accepted his news. Her chatter about it would not be factual evidence, but it would be good color.

Next: move the body before daylight. That would mean going back to London for his car. There was a train at 6:20 from Thaleham. He glanced at his watch—twelve minutes past six. It was of great importance that he should catch that train—and it was at least five minutes walk to the station, maybe a bit extra lugging the large deedbox.

He felt no emotion while he possessed himself of the dead man's latchkey, but it took time—and more time to detach the key from the bunch. It was now fourteen minutes past six.

The deedbox was upside down, spreadeagled, about half its contents scattered. It would take, say, another minute to collect the papers—and he would probably miss the 6:20.

"If anyone comes into this house

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

before I've moved the body I'm sunk, whatever I do," he said aloud. "The deedbox can wait until I come back. Good murderers don't panic."

What about the lights? Better put them out. Before switching off in the hall he observed that the stamped letter was no longer on the tray—posted, presumably, by Mrs. Harbutt. No concern of his.

"If anyone sees me leaving he may wonder why there was no light in the hall. That's the sort of risk I shall have to keep on taking."

As he reached the end of the drive and was about to step onto the road a light flashed in his face —from the lamp of a bicycle.

"Why, it's Mr. Harry Finchmoor! You haven't forgotten George Dobson, Mr. Harry?"

"Of course I remember you, George!" Again he had beaten off panic. Here was merely another witness that he was leaving Thaleham at this time. "I'll be down again next week and we must have a drink. As it is, I have to hurry for the 6:20."

"You won't make it." George was looking over the valley and could see the lights of the train at the bend. "I'd say you've only got three minutes. Here, you take the bike, Mr. Harry, and I'll pick it up at the station."

Finchmoor thanked him profusely and accepted the offer. In this business of cop dodging, luck cut both ways and would tend to cancel itself out. He had not ridden a bicycle since boyhood. The first twenty yards were perilous, but at worst it was faster than walking—if he could stick on.

The train was at the platform and the stationmaster was holding a door open for him.

"Hop in, Mr. Harry. Any luck?"

"Smiles all the way, Mr. Hawkins," grinned Finchmoor. More color. But did the police take any notice of color?

In the train he contemplated the problem of hiding the corpse. He could return after the village had gone to bed. There was always a little through traffic at night. Barring accidents, it would be easy enough to get away.

And then? This would be the difficult bit. He was no hand with a spade. What a pity he could not consult Lorna.

Lorna!

You grabbed me in an outworked gravel pit—That gravel pit was in the Wey Valley, about fifteen miles from Thaleham—off the main road on a patch of derelict land with a "cliff" of about twenty feet and a thick undergrowth of brambles. Just what he needed!

What about Lorna's own reactions when that gravel pit came into the news? Risky—but not half so risky as cruising about the countryside in the dark, looking for somewhere to hide his cargo.

Arrived in London, he dined at his club—signing his bill, as did

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

most members, to be settled by monthly check. He chose a single table so that he could elaborate the Blueprint, which seemed to him to be shaping up very well. All the details were arranging themselves neatly. Rain had started, but he always carried rubbers and a plastic mackintosh in the car. By eleven he was turning into the short drive of the manor house.

He entered the house with a certain complacency, but when he had replaced the latchkey on its ring he had a sharp reaction of self-pity. An abominable thing had happened to him, causing him to prowl at night, performing ghoulish acts in order to erect a barrier of deceit between himself and the kind of people he respected and liked—the men he met in business—at the club—women like Lorna Brendwright. Well, at least he would do the job intelligently—so that the whole horror could be forgotten in a week or two.

He thought it as simple as that because he had never interested himself in the literature of crime and knew nothing of the subsidiary problems facing a murderer, and he knew next to nothing of the methods of the police—except that they used fingerprints. In a couple of minutes his complacency returned and he proceeded to make one mistake after another—mistakes that did not have to be made.

He went to the kitchen quarters, first pulling on a pair of light gloves. His fingerprints in the dining room and the hall would be expected, but there must be none elsewhere.

He found Mrs. Harbutt's cottage pie on a shelf in the gas cooker. He turned the regulator to full heat and then, somewhat awkwardly in gloves, applied a match. When the potato crust had been browned, he served a portion on a plate and then flushed the portion, leaving a dirtied plate and fork on the table. According to the Blueprint this would convince the police that Brendwright had been alive at midday on Wednesday. *Later, Mrs. Harbutt, of course, was able to assure the police that if anyone had eaten part of the pie it was certainly not Mr. Brendwright—and the police noted an attempt to fake a "Time" clue.*

Finchmoor had thought of Mrs. Harbutt only in connection with the Victorian bell-rope whose absence from the wall she would be certain to notice. He removed the rope from the body—some eight feet of it with a large tassel at the bottom and a large rosette at the top. The bell-rope, he discovered, was a dummy, secured with four wall-plugs, one of which was missing. He cobbled the rope back into position without it. *Later, police routine found the missing wall-plug in the fringe of the hearthrug. Routine, too, led from the wall-plug to the wall, then to the bell-rope, which was detached and sent*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to Laboratory. Thus, Finchmoor's little flourish made the police a present of the murder weapon and of an attempt to fake a clue as to "place."

He collected his papers from the floor, locked the deedbox, and put it in the car. Then came the labor of stowing the body and hiding it from passing lights. He returned to the house for a final check-up, though there was really nothing, in Harry's opinion, to check. He dawdled, as if he were reluctant to leave—a superstitious feeling, perhaps, that everything was proving too easy.

He drove the fifteen miles to the outworked gravel pit and stowed the body in the brambles.

By four in the morning he was back in his flat in Wengrove Square, which is in West London. The square is an open car park and he was as confident as he was entitled to be that no one in London had observed his movements with the car.

The Blueprint gave place to a formula—that on the Tuesday afternoon Brendwright had accepted Finchmoor's detailed offer. Thus, on the following morning, Wednesday, Finchmoor went to his office as usual. After returning the deedbox to the Safe Deposit he instructed his lawyer to start the ball rolling.

On Thursday morning his secretary handed him a telephoned message from Lorna: *Re Thaleham: please ring my flat.* He guessed her news *Re Thaleham.* He did not ring. In half an hour he was on his way to her flat in West Kensington.

"Uncle John is missing." She spoke as if telling him gently that he had bungled. "Mrs. Harbutt rang me before I left for the office." Presently she was describing the functions of Mrs. Harbutt.

"She's a very sensible woman. This morning she found the house empty. There was some rigmarole I couldn't follow about a pie which he had or had not eaten. For some reason the pie incident upset her. His bed had not been slept in Wednesday night—she poked about and found that he must have left the house in the clothes he was wearing. So I rang the local police and told them what I suspected."

That revealed to him some of his mistakes.

"And what *do* you suspect?"

He had to wait for her answer.

"This is going to be difficult, Harry. Please be patient with me," she pleaded. "I was staggered when you told me on the telephone that he had accepted your offer. You had been in the house for less than two hours. In that short time you cured him of his obsession. I tried to believe it."

"Go on," he invited. This was getting very near the knuckle. "What did you believe instead?"

"That he was putting on an act. He saw that the land would be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

taken from him—your payments would seem to him a sort of sellout of his honor. I believe his mind was upset and that he went out and drowned himself."

She would soon learn that it had not been suicide. And she would still not believe that he had talked the old man over. His position would need some strengthening.

"I don't think suicide was in his mind," he said weightily, "but I think death was. Perhaps that doctor really did scare him. Anyway, he said that if he were to die while our deal was still being dolled up by the lawyers I must promise to transfer the whole deal to you, as beneficiary. I gave him my promise."

Like the traditional pirate, he was dumping some of his cargo in the hope of shaking off his pursuers. Not as a bribe—you couldn't bribe Lorna. He was paying—say, £12,000—to give his statement the color of truth.

"He was a pathetic old dreamer!" There was compassion in her voice and gentleness in her eyes. "The obsession again! Like mother, I am his 'kinswoman.' He wanted to provide for me in this left-handed way."

"Very sensible of him, I'd say."

"Uncle John was not very sane. And of course I shall not hold you to that promise."

"You *could* not hold me to that promise and you *cannot* release me," he said. He had come near to bluffing himself that he was behaving in an honorable and generous manner. "My lawyers will handle it—if your uncle really is dead."

He expected her to protest that she would refuse the money. But she did not.

"I see that was a foolish remark of mine—I apologize," she said. "I will not obstruct your lawyers."

Not even a thank-you. Very reasonable, in view of the explanation he had given her. Most women, he felt, would have fluttered a little—stammering out something about an honorable and generous act. But not Lorna.

After lunch he told his lawyers the little tale about the promise. It would be better, he said, to embody the reversion to Lorna in the Agreement.

On Saturday the local police called in Scotland Yard. On the following Thursday a local constable, patrolling the Wey Valley with a dog, found the body. It missed the evening editions—Finchmoor heard about it from a radio news flash and hurried home to await the police. But his only caller that evening was Lorna.

"I was wrong about suicide," she said, in a tone in which she might have remarked on the weather.

"Come inside, first. You look tired out."

She stopped in the doorway of the sitting room.

"He has been murdered—strangled." Her voice was thin and un-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

controlled. "He was found—*Harry,* the body was found—in an outworked gravel pit in the Wey Valley."

"Steady!" He led her to a chair and gave her brandy.

She sipped and put down the glass. "I don't know why I behaved like that. It did not occur to me that it might be *our* gravel pit until I came into this room."

She meant that she had suddenly glimpsed the possibility that he might be the murderer, even if she had already put the thought aside. She could suspect him if she liked —the police certainly would. But nobody could now prove the exact time of death.

"Let's stare this in the face," he said. "There are at least a couple of hundred ex-gravel pits in that stretch of the valley. Still, it might turn out to be *our* gravel pit. But can we call it *our* gravel pit? I don't really feel sentimental about my act of youthful loutishenss."

"You're quite right," she said. "We've met again as adults—as different persons." She talked about her interview with the police. "A Chief Inspector Karslake—a pleasant enough man but asking wearisome questions about Uncle John. Oh!—he asked me if anyone profited by his death and I said I thought you did."

"Actually, I don't—but it doesn't matter—the police will come to see me anyway."

Karslake called in the morning —at Finchmoor's flat, before he left for the office. He began by asking the effect of Brendwright's death on the land development scheme.

"No effect at all on my interest in the deal." He brought in the little tale about Lorna as beneficiary. "If you want the details, my solicitors will give you the layout." He could not resist adding another bit of color. "The truth is, Mr. Karslake, the murderer came too late to be of any use to me."

He was equally ready to account for his movements.

"In my mind the saga begins when I had lunch with Miss Brendwright on Tuesday, when she warned me the Compulsory Purchase was threatening. From the Besc Chinar to the Safe Deposit to collect relevant documents—then Thaleham by train, catching the 6:20 back—dinner at my club—then home, to work into the small hours. Between then and now—office—deedbox back to Safe Deposit—lunch—solicitors—office—home—late work again. Oh, yes, one morning visit to Miss Brendwright's flat."

There were gaps, of course, which Karslake probed but without finding a sensitive spot. In short, the alibi stood up.

If Finchmoor had no motive for the murder, who had? Beginning with the owner of the village pub, Karslake found about fifty persons who would benefit, indirectly but certainly, from the building scheme

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which Brendwright was known to be opposing.

The medical evidence boiled down to the opinion that death had occurred within twenty-four hours of midday on Wednesday. Police work had established that the murder had been committed in the house, after Mrs. Harbutt had left it at about five on Tuesday afternoon and before she returned at eight on Thursday morning.

There was evidence that clues of time and place had been faked but no evidence of the identity of the faker. There was no evidence that death had been inflicted before Finchmoor left the house on Tuesday evening—nor that his account of his subsequent movements was untrue in any particular.

Moreover, it would have been physically impossible for the same person—say, Finchmoor—to have committed the murder, obtained the use of a car, transported the body fifteen miles and hidden it, and then returned to Thaleham in time to catch the 6:20 train to London.

By the end of a month every line of inquiry had been followed to its end. The dossier was sent to the Department of Dead Ends, together with the Victorian bell-rope and the laboratory report stating that glandular deposits had been present on the rope which would be consistent with the theory that the rope had been used for strangulation.

Detective Inspector Rason was fascinated by the bell-rope, considered as a murder weapon. Some liked a gun, a knife, or a cosh, but this one liked a nice bit o' bell-rope. It looked more like a woman's trick.

The dossier lent little support to the suggestion that Lorna Brendwright had strangled her uncle and removed the body. Rason thought no more about the case until a five-line paragraph appeared seven months later in an evening paper. It was headed *Thaleham Mystery Echo* and stated that the restoration of Rose Cottage had been interrupted by Mr. Harry Finchmoor who had ordered its immediate demolition. The echo may have been faint, but Rason—as not infrequently happened—heard it as a bellow . . .

In those seven months there had been no hitch in what we may call the business side of the murder. The financial company had allotted 50,000 one-pound shares to Finchmoor, of which he had assigned 12,000 to Lorna Brendwright—effected through lawyers, with no personal acknowledgment by Lorna. The separate sale of the mortgaged manor house—to be used as a clubhouse in the housing development—brought Lorna next to nothing. Rose Cottage, which the developing company did not want, since it was on an isolated site on the other side of the village, remained Finchmoor's property.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As murders go, this one had turned out very well. Finchmoor congratulated himself on—roughly—everything. There was now no reason why he should not proceed to have a good time.

But there was no good time. Instead, there was Lorna—though she never deliberately did him any harm. In the sense in which Brendwright had provoked his own death, Finchmoor groomed Lorna as "the fatal woman"—a role for which she was singularly unsuited.

The self-congratulation soon staled, if only because he did not value success as a criminal. He was not deeply in love with Lorna and could easily have kept his distance. It would seem that he regarded Lorna's company at a restaurant or theater as a passport to the civilization he had never wished to repudiate.

Even so, her intelligent chatter had a bitter-sweet quality. She was apt to speak suddenly of the death of her uncle, as if it were always at the back of her thoughts.

"Uncle John actually paid that fifty pounds to start restoring Rose Cottage. I feel I have the duty to him to go on with it. Will you sell me the cottage, Harry?"

"Certainly not!" He said it with a smile. "I will restore it to your specifications. I'll be your landlord, and your rent will be a real peppercorn placed in my hand in the presence of witnesses—it's probably never been done before."

At the back of his mind was the thought that they would marry and use it on week-ends. Similar thoughts about her were always at the back of his mind. He now rather liked her slight bossiness. Physically she attracted him, though he was not yet ready to make love—he was waiting for something which he failed to define.

"As you please, Harry." There was a polite smile at his little joke about the peppercorn. Nothing about preferring to have it on a proper business footing. In a month she sent him a surveyor's report and specifications. Nothing—not one word—about his kindness. Some weeks later, in a pause following discussion of a film, she remarked, "Mrs. Harbutt says that when she came in with the tea tray that day, Uncle was telling you about George III."

"Quite right! And very glad I was to see her." So far, his finesse had always succeeded and he tried it again. "I was amused by the way she instructed him to warm up some food she had prepared for the next day."

"She told the police that somebody—not Uncle John—had warmed up the pie and pretended to eat it."

There was no follow-up, nor did she expect him to make any answer. He wondered why she would blurt out that sort of thing, like a feather-head, when she was in fact

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an uncommonly self-possessed woman. He was not afraid of her. All her blurting could be done in the presence of the police without the possibility of their learning anything dangerous.

The climax came in the eighth month—in a theater, of all inappropriate places. The play was a successful light comedy and both responded to it. As the lights were lowered after the second act, she leaned toward him.

"I drove down to the Wey Valley last Saturday. You said there were at least two hundred outworked gravel pits. There is only one. And it's *our* gravel pit."

He sat through the last act, not hearing a word of it. But he did hear her laughing. She was attending to the play and she smiled and applauded when the cast took their curtain calls.

He gave the taximan his own address. As they entered the flat together, he had the impression that she knew what he was about to say.

"Lorna, dear. Will you please tell me whether or not you believe I killed your uncle?"

"I do not *believe* that you killed Uncle John," she answered without hesitation. "Wait, please, Harry. I do have the feeling sometimes—like a sort of waking dream—that you might have, even that you *did*. I hoped the feeling would pass if we went out together—"

"—While you drop in little bits like that bit about the gravel pit? To see how the puppet dances on the string?"

"That's unworthy of you. It's—petty."

"I know it is, but I can't help it. You've known me from childhood but you're able to believe that I *might* turn out to be the kind of uncivilized brute we both despise."

"It's not as clear-cut as that—it's a sort of nervous twitch. Doesn't it count that I want us to be friends?" She was almost pleading. "Can't we go on as we are?"

"I don't think so," he said carefully. "I can never drive out that—waking dream—of yours, because I am an ordinary man, the ordinary mixture of good and evil. Capable, no doubt, of all sorts of abominations, but not very likely to put them into action. But that's not good enough, is it?"

"I never guessed it would seem to you like that." She was grave and unhappy. "Do you want us not to meet again?"

Her words suddenly fanned a passionate desire—as if he demanded her body to prove to himself that he had not forfeited his civilization. Now or never.

"Wrong side up, Lorna. I want us to come closer. I want us to cut out haverings and daytime nightmares. You know that I love you and have been waiting for you to give me a chance to say so." He dropped onto the settee beside her. "Yes? No? . . . You don't know? In a minute we'll both know."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As once before, in an outworked gravel pit, he made a scuffle of it. She remained inert while he engaged himself in the unrewarding business of kissing her. Then she stood up and in that moment he knew that it was fear of her contempt that had stampeded him into the murder. Puppet.

"When you're not offered what you want, you grab it." Her voice shut out himself and his misery. "Goodbye, Harry."

"All right! But we needn't be stagey. Let me drive you home." She had turned her back and was already letting herself out of the flat. "Unless you're afraid of being grabbed and murdered on the way," he shouted after her.

That certainly was petty, he reflected. All right, so it was petty. And there would be some more pettiness tomorrow. If she thought she would still get Rose Cottage without even saying thank-you, she would find she had pulled the wrong string. He was *not* a puppet. Rose Cottage was inconsiderable as a property, and as a symbol it symbolized only—puppetry.

Before he went to bed he wrote an order for its demolition.

A man was behaving in an unusual manner with a cottage. A man had behaved in an unusual manner with a bell-rope. There was nothing to connect the two events —nothing except the mind of Detective Inspector Rason.

From the local contractor he heard the whole story of Rose Cottage, and he enjoyed every word of it. He interviewed various local persons including George Dobson, who told him the bicycle story and other things which were already in the dossier—events which he now re-interpreted by pinning them all on the bell-rope.

A week later he reported to Chief Inspector Karslake.

"Thaleham case. Remember that bell-rope? What does a sane man want with a bell-rope? He wants it to ring a bell. See what I mean, sir?"

"No," said Karslake. "Do you?"

"Brendwright never agreed to deal. The old loony got hot about it and Finchmoor wanted to ring the bell hoping it would bring somebody to help cool him down —not knowing that the bell-rope was a dummy. Meaning, they quarreled like hell and in the end Finchmoor lassoed him with the bell-rope."

"Maybe," grunted Karslake. "Look—unless you've got a witness that Finchmoor did not dine at his club at 8:15 and then go back to his flat and stay there—"

"If I'd got that I'd have pulled him in. I wrote him a nice letter, asking him if he could drop in one day this week and tell me why he's demolishing Rose Cottage. He's downstairs now. If I may use your intercom I'll tell 'em to show him into my room."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"All right," Karslake conceded, holding himself in, "but if you bring in any of that bell-rope bilge I shall break up the party."

When Finchmoor was announced Rason admired his stance. Not the slightest trace of anxiety. Indeed, Harry felt no anxiety. He knew that, by the nature of the case, no new event could rivet the time of death to his movements.

Civilities were exchanged. "Mr. Finchmoor has kindly come along to clear up the mystery of Rose Cottage for us," said Rason.

"It's not very mysterious," began Finchmoor. He outlined the facts, beginning with Mrs. Harbutt posting Brendwright's letter enclosing the check for fifty pounds to start restoration. "When I found Miss Brendwright had lost interest I thought I'd clear the site for a modern house."

Finchmoor's self-satisfaction, thought Rason, made it easy to hit him.

"If Brendwright was alive when you left the house—you mustn't mind my putting it like that, Mr. Finchmoor—why didn't he write at once to cancel the order and save his fifty quid?" Rason added. "I mean, you tell us he had just made a deal with you which blotted him out from everything except the manor house. Looks as if he didn't understand what he was doing."

"He certainly did understand," asserted Finchmoor. "He was quite clear about his legal position. I had brought all the papers in the case but he only glanced at one letter—he accepted the documents as read."

"Then try it this way," persisted Rason. "You expected a bit of an argument. But within a short time you clinched the deal. Weren't you a bit surprised at your success?"

"I don't know about that," smiled Finchmoor. "I certainly expected it to take a bit longer."

"Then why were you in such a mortal hurry, Mr. Finchmoor, to catch that 6:20 train?"

That told Finchmoor there was more in it than Rose Cottage.

"I hardly know, after all this time. I suppose it was in my mind that I would have to make a digest of our discussion and link it up with the documents—for my lawyers."

"You would have missed that train but for George Dobson's bike—you very nearly missed it with the bike. Dobson says you wobbled all over the road."

"I hadn't ridden one since I was a boy—but I did manage it."

"We know that Mr. Finchmoor caught the 6:20," put in Karslake.

"We do, sir," beamed Rason. "We checked it by the time at which he dined at his club, didn't we? But I'm still worried about all those legal documents, et cetera, which Brendwright did not read."

"He didn't need to read them, Mr. Rason," said Finchmoor patiently. "He accepted my statements—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes, but I mean what did *you* do about 'em. When you were wobbling about on Dobson's bike, *were you balancing a big heavy deedbox on the handlebars?*"

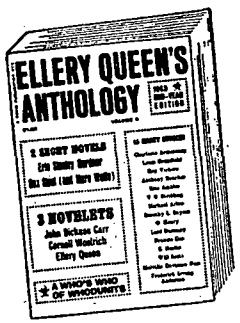
Good murderers don't panic. Finchmoor's boast now helped him to keep up appearances.

"I don't remember."

Rason kept up the pressure.

"Dobson remembers that you were carrying nothing. So does Hawkins, the stationmaster, who bundled you into the train. So—when you caught the 6:20, you had left your deedbox in the manor house." Rason shuffled papers from the dossier, but it was only stage business. "The following morning you returned that deedbox to Safe Deposit—you said so yourself. Now, Mr. Finchmoor, *how did you regain possession of your deedbox?* Did you return that night in your car—"

Finchmoor was not listening. He was thinking about Lorna—and the color of truth . . .



NOW ON SALE

ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY / 505 PARK AVENUE / NEW YORK 22, N. Y.

Please send me _____ copies of ELLERY QUEEN'S 1963 ANTHOLOGY—Mid-Year Edition No. 5.
I am enclosing $1 for each copy ($1.25 outside U.S.A.). E663

Name_____
(Please print)

Address_____

City_____ Zone_____ State_____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JAMES M. ULLMAN**

TITLE: ***Operation Bonaparte***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVES: Michael Dane James and Ted Bennett

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Another adventure of the two industrial investigators—this time, a "classic" case of an embezzling and absconding financier, hiding out in Rio with $8,000,000 of the stockholders' money . . .*

TED BENNETT NODDED TO THE RECEPTIONIST, deposited a two-suiter in a corner, and strode unannounced into the office of Michael Dane James, business and industrial espionage consultant.

James, a broad-shouldered, middle-aged man of medium height, looked up with a scowl. He settled his horn-rimmed glasses on his pug nose and demanded, "What are *you* doing back in New York? You're supposed to be on assignment in Rio, finding out where Lou Orloff is hiding the eight million he stole."

"I left hurriedly," Bennett explained. He pulled up a chair and lit a cigarette. "Anyhow, I didn't see much point in sticking around."

"You didn't? Well, I do. That stockholders' committee is paying us good money to investigate Orloff's finances." James rubbed a hand over his close-cropped hair and sighed. "Not that the information will help them much. Once a thief like Orloff gets himself and his loot out of the country, the cause is lost. Those poor investors who paid thirty dollars a share for Orloff's stock in its heyday will be lucky to get one cent on a dollar. But Sam Powell, the attorney for the committee, is a good friend of mine. What little help we can give him, I want to give him."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bennett, a tall, lean man in his late thirties, said positively, "Mickey, I spent two weeks nosing around in Rio. And believe me, we won't learn anything more about Orloff's finances down there than we know now."

"Sure we will, Ted. He's living in a lavish villa, keeping to himself and making only rare public appearances, just as he did in the States—before his corporate house of cards started tumbling, before the stockholders learned he was looting their company like a bank robber going through a vault, exchanging the company's assets for stock in a pyramid of worthless holding companies under his control, and then selling the assets and stashing the money nobody-knows-where. But a man like Orloff—he won't allow those stolen millions to lie idle. He's probably putting it all into South American real estate, or making a down payment on a fleet of tankers."

Bennett shook his head. "Orloff is not doing any of those things. His tangible assets in Brazil consist of one villa and one Mercedes-Benz automobile. Less than a hundred thousand dollars in value at the very most."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because," Bennett said, gazing blandly at the ceiling, "the man who has been dodging reporters and living in luxury in Rio for the last five weeks—that man is *not* Lou Orloff . . ."

Thoughtfully Sam Powell chewed on a cigar. A large, bearish man, he peered out of his Manhattan penthouse window. Then he turned back to James and Bennett.

"Well," he drawled, "that *is* a poser."

"It sure is," James agreed. "While everyone snooped around the mystery man living in conspicuous seclusion in Rio, the real Orloff had five weeks in which to bury himself in some other part of the world."

"He's taking quite a risk," Powell said. "The impersonation was sure to be discovered sooner or later. And that imposter might talk."

"I don't think," Bennett interrupted, "the imposter knows Orloff's true whereabouts any more than we do. The false Orloff gets two thousand dollars deposited to his account in a Rio bank on the first of every month. The money is sent from a numbered account in a Swiss bank. That's his living allowance—and two thousand a month can go a long, long way in Brazil, especially when you're occupying a villa that's already paid for."

"How did you find him out?" Powell asked.

"I began to suspect," Bennett said, "when, despite all the checks I made, I couldn't find that he owned anything of value in Brazil except the house and the car. Supposedly, he'd stolen eight million dollars from your company. Where was it? Moreover, he made no ap-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

parent attempt to communicate, by mail, telephone, or any other means, with anyone in any other part of the world. And unlike the real Orloff, who spent most of his time cooking up new swindles, *this* Orloff seemed mostly concerned with sitting around his swimming pool and drinking rum. He's accompanied by the real Orloff's secretary, incidentally, a Miss Irene Conover, a stony-faced old girl who turned up with him in Rio and no doubt keeps cluing him in on how the real Orloff behaved."

"Ted," James put in, "bribed a servant to steal a glass from the supposed Orloff. He took the fingerprints from the glass and compared them with the real Orloff's. They didn't match."

"If that man isn't Orloff," Powell speculated, "then who is he?"

"We already know that," James replied. "Before coming to see you, we ran the false Orloff's prints through the machinery we employ in industrial security investigations. The false Orloff's prints were on file because he'd been in the Army. His name is Herb Vann. Vann was a second-rate actor before the war. After the war he tried to make a go of it as a master of ceremonies in night clubs. He stuck with that for twelve years, without any significant success, and finally quit. He became a traveling salesman, based in Worcester, Massachusetts, handling a line of men's wear. A little more than five weeks ago—a few days after the real Orloff disappeared from New York—Vann disappeared from New England. He'd quit his job and told his employers and friends he was moving to the West Coast."

"He maintained his bank account, though," Bennett said. "Only now it's a lot heftier than it ever was before. The day he dropped out of sight, he added twenty thousand dollars to the few hundred then in the account."

"Vann," James said, "did meet the real Orloff several times. We learned that from a talk with Vann's former booking agent. Vann bore such a decided physical resemblance to Orloff that a number of Orloff's acquaintances, who caught Vann's act, brought the actor to Orloff's attention. Orloff went to see Vann's act and was so impressed with the resemblance that once or twice he hired Vann to perform at parties, imitating Orloff himself. Orloff got a big kick out of it."

"It seems," Powell mused, "we have a problem. We three know that Lou Orloff, who is under a number of State and Federal indictments for fraud, and who stole eight million dollars from the stockholders I represent, is *not* hiding in South America, as the rest of the world believes. If we transmit this knowledge to the authorities, the deception will be exposed, as it should be. But if we do that, the real Orloff, wherever he is, will be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

doubly on his guard. If he—and any part of our eight million dollars—is still in the United States, he might move the money out of the country immediately. What little chance we'd have of recovering any of the money would be lost."

James glanced at Bennett. Then he said, "Give us a chance to crack this one, Sam. Let Orloff go on thinking for another few weeks that the impersonation is still undetected. We'd like nothing better than to nail a thief of Orloff's proportions."

"But where on earth," Powell asked, "would you start looking for Orloff? Because by now, he could be *anywhere* on earth."

"Right here in New York," James said, "where the real Orloff was last known to be. That's *one* place we'll begin. Another is Worcester, Massachusetts, where the actor now playing the role of Orloff was last heard of under his own name."

"All right," Powell said slowly. "If you think there's a chance . . ."

"There's a chance," James replied. "I'll go to Worcester, and start tracking Herb Vann. And Ted will start dogging Orloff. I'd do that myself—only one of the people to be checked is Orloff's ex-mistress. And since Ted is a bachelor and I have a wife and family out in Scarsdale, I think Ted should get that assignment."

Patricia Doyle added a jigger of vermouth to the pitcher and stirred. She filled two cocktail glasses and handed one to Bennett.

"Cheers," she said. She sipped and walked to a chair and sat down. Dark-haired and still under thirty, she wore a decorous blue afternoon dress.

"This stockholder's committee you're working for," she said. "Do you really think you can recover any of the money Lou stole?"

"Right now," Bennett conceded, "the prospects don't look good."

"I don't imagine they do. Lou was a very thorough man. When I look back, I can see now that he was planning this all along. He bought the villa in Rio, you know, more than a year ago. I was with him. He asked me not to mention the purchase to anyone. He said the stockholders might get the wrong idea. Actually, he was afraid they'd get the right idea."

"Miss Doyle," Bennett said, "we'd appreciate your cooperation . . ."

The woman chuckled. "It's a pleasure, Mr. Bennett. Between you and me, the last few months I was just someone Lou dragged around with him, as a sort of decoration. Frankly, I wanted to leave him a long time ago, but he wouldn't let me. Oh, I'm a big girl, and when Lou persuaded me to become what the newspapers call his 'companion,' I went into the deal with my eyes wide open. I thought: 'Here's a high-powered businessman, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

if you play your cards right, maybe you can persuade him to marry you.' Well, I soon found out how wrong *that* notion was. First, Lou Orloff wasn't marrying anyone, and second, I learned he wasn't a high-powered businessman. He was a high-powered crook. After just three months with him I concluded he'd wind up either an exile, which he is now, or a convict. It was inevitable."

She sipped again at her martini.

"I stuck with him," she went on, "because he solved a lot of my problems—like paying the rent and buying the groceries. He wasn't lavish. Actually, he was stingy. But he had to buy me furs and jewelry because it was part of his act—the wealthy, confident man-of-the-world. He wasn't really confident, though. He was always scared someone was going to rob him. He figured everyone was as big a crook as he was. He didn't trust *anyone*, not even me. I remember once, we were driving through a desert in Arizona and something went wrong with the car. Lou was furious. Not because we were stuck alone out there in the desert, with the temperature more than a hundred and snakes crawling over the highway, but because he was sure, absolutely sure, that when a trooper found us and radioed for a tow truck, the operator of the tow truck was going to pad the bill."

She put her glass down and lit a cigarette.

"It's hard to explain. I hated him because he was cruel, a cheat, and so suspicious of others that he belonged in a mental hospital. But on the other hand—well, I've got to admit it, I had to admire him. He started with nothing—not a thin dime. He spent his early years as a roustabout in the Louisiana and Texas oil fields. He was a huge man, very tough and very strong. He worked out every morning with bar bells. And physically, he was fearless. He earned a lot of medals during the war, you know—I saw the bullet scars. He was a raider out in the Pacific islands, operating behind the enemy lines. And one time he got shot full of bullets, stood up, and killed eleven Japanese with an automatic rifle. They gave him a Silver Star for that."

"The reason I'm here," Bennett said, "is to see if we can trace Orloff's exact movements between New York and Rio. So we can get some sort of lead to the eight million dollars . . ."

Patricia Doyle shrugged. "I couldn't tell you. His secretary, Irene Conover, handled those details. And Lou never trusted her much, either." She paused. "I can guarantee you one thing, though."

"What's that?"

"Wherever Lou went, he picked up his strongbox first."

"What strongbox?"

"A big metal one. He had some diamonds in it—what he called his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

'hard wealth,' something he could use for currency in case the country got blown up by atom bombs, or he had to skip in a hurry. But more important than that, the box contains his personal ledger. I opened that ledger once, and he socked me—smack in the face. At the time I didn't realize what the notations meant. I do now. This ledger shows exactly what he did with the money he stole from your stockholders."

"What did you see when you opened it?"

"He'd trace the sale of some property or stock from your company—up to the holding company on top of all the other holding companies he owned. And then he'd show where the money went after he drew it out of the last holding company."

"Do you remember," Bennett asked, "where the money did go?"

She laughed. "Lou fooled me there. He used code names, I guess. According to the book, all the money he stole went to Napoleon."

"Napoleon?"

"Not 'Napoleon,' exactly. He'd list these sums, then some names of companies and people I never heard of, and finally the code name for where the money was hidden away. And usually the code name would be 'Bonaparte.' Just that one word. He had an awful lot of money in 'Bonaparte'!"

"Where did Orloff keep this strongbox?"

"He moved it around, but always to cities where one of his companies had an office. The last time I remember, Mr. Bennett, he had it hidden somewhere in Kansas City, Missouri. That was maybe two months before he left New York. If that strongbox was still in Kansas City, he went there before he went anywhere else. You can make book on that."

Bennett stepped into a telephone booth on a Kansas City downtown street. He asked the long-distance operator to connect him with the number of a booth in a hotel in Richmond, Virginia.

Michael Dane James answered. "Ted?"

"Yes, Mickey."

"I hope you've uncovered something, because I haven't got much. Vann came to Richmond from Worcester, to see his mother. He told her he was going abroad for a while. She remembers he had tickets for New Orleans, and that once he telephoned a woman in New Orleans collect. I'd imagine that woman was Orloff's secretary, Irene Conover, who turned up in Rio with Vann. New Orleans must have been where they met."

"Well, I'm on a hot trail here," Bennett reported. "Orloff made an appearance at his Kansas City office the day after he left New York. He had the strongbox under his arm. It was after the building closed, and the watchman had to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

unlock the door to let him in. The watchman remembers that Orloff went up to his office for a while and then came back down. Orloff was picked up by a man driving a 1960 Chevrolet sedan. Orloff got into the sedan with his strongbox and the two men drove away."

"Anything else?"

"Plenty. The superintendent let me into Orloff's office—it cost a ten-spot. Orloff's furnishings are still there, although they'll be sold soon for nonpayment of rent. I found Orloff's classified telephone book open to the private detective section. He'd checked a little agency just a few blocks from his own office. So I walked over to the agency—and found that it's gone out of business."

"Why?"

"Because the private detective who ran it—a guy named Prentiss—is dead. He was killed in an automobile wreck. His car went off the road somewhere in Arkansas and landed in a ditch. The accident happened the same night Orloff showed up with his strongbox. And Prentiss was driving a 1960 Chevrolet sedan."

"Sounds to me," James said, "as though Orloff and Prentiss left Kansas City together. With Prentiss hired, perhaps, as a bodyguard, since Orloff had his precious strongbox."

"I talked to the detective's widow," Bennett went on. "Prentiss had done some work for Orloff in the past—industrial spying, a few years ago. The widow said she didn't know where Prentiss was going the night he was killed in Arkansas. All she knows is, her husband called from his office, said an important job had come up, and he'd be out of town a day or so. The next word she had of Prentiss was a telephone call from a sheriff in Arkansas, telling her that her husband had been found dead in this wrecked car."

"Anyone else in the car with Prentiss?"

"Nobody was *found* in the car with him. The widow and the sheriff assumed Prentiss was traveling alone, on his way to a job."

"Well," James said, "it's almost sure that Prentiss had a passenger when he left Kansas City—namely, Lou Orloff. You'd better drive to Arkansas and look into the accident further. I'm going to New Orleans, to see if I can discover what happened to Vann after he arrived there." James hesitated. "We seem," he added, "to be headed more or less in the same direction. Maybe in a day or so we'll both wind up in the same place."

Bennett turned off the highway at the foot of the hill. His rented car bumped up a dirt road a hundred yards or so to a frame house.

He braked and cut the engine. In a wooded area to his right, a man who had been digging a hole stopped, jammed a shovel into the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ground, and started wearily toward Bennett.

Bennett climbed from the car and walked toward the man who was heavy-set and in his forties. The man paused to mop his brow as Bennett neared.

"Howdy," Bennett said. "I'm from an insurance company. I'm investigating an accident that happened in front of your property last month."

Ruefully the man smiled. "I heard about that. Sorry, but I probably can't help you much. My name's Gordon, and I took possession of this place only two days ago. I just bought the property."

"What happened to the former owner?"

"He's an old farmer, Ira Wilson. He moved to Florida, he didn't exactly say where." Gordon dug into a shirt pocket and pulled out a cigar. He bent and lit it. "I'm from Fort Smith, y'see. Always wanted a country place of my own. For vacations and week-ends and retirement . . ."

"Sure. You mind if I see where they found the car?"

"Not at all."

Bennett and Gordon trudged through the woods.

"It's kind of a long time since the accident happened," Gordon observed. "How come you're lookin' into it now?"

"It's a life insurance policy," Bennett explained glibly. "The claim was filed just last week. I haven't talked to the sheriff yet, but I got the accident report from a deputy in his office. Apparently, the accident happened up ahead there, where the road curves."

"That's right. It's easy to find the exact spot, because the car knocked down a tree."

Bennett viewed the fallen tree, which lay at the foot of a steep incline. He took a camera from his pocket.

"This is a lonely spot," Bennett said. "Now I understand what they meant on that accident report—that the exact time of the accident was unknown. A wreck could lie here for hours, especially at night, without anyone seeing it from the road."

"That's true," Gordon said. "There's very little traffic. And now that you mention it, a car's headlights wouldn't sweep down that far."

Bennett took some pictures.

"Well," he said, returning the camera to his pocket and pulling out a notebook, "it does look ordinary enough. That is a steep curve." He began writing.

"They tell me," Gordon said, "there's an accident here at least two or three times a year."

"The deputy said that too. Thanks for showing me around."

Gordon accompanied Bennett back to his car. Bennett waved, drove back to the road, and returned to the Arkansas county seat where the sheriff had his office.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The sheriff was in this time. A stony-faced, alert young man, he said, "I understand you been looking into that fatal accident down by the Wilson place."

"The Gordon place, you mean."

"That's right," the sheriff smiled. "Old Ira Wilson sold out and left for Florida or somewhere. He never did tell anyone exactly where. He must have inherited a fair pile of money, though. Four weeks ago, just before he sold his place to Gordon, Ira bought himself a new Cadillac. With cash."

"Who in his family died?"

"Some old aunt, Ira said. He'd never mentioned her before. But I guess she musta been loaded. About this accident. You think there's something wrong?"

"You never can tell. After all, Prentiss was a private detective."

"I know. The thought occurred to us, too. But there didn't seem anything out of the ordinary. The steering wheel went right through the man when the car hit the tree. It's a bad curve, and it'd been raining. It makes the pavement there a lot slicker than a city man like Prentiss might think. I checked that wreck real close, and so did the state troopers. The only thing we didn't understand was—there was a hubcap missing."

"A hubcap?"

"Off the rear wheel. Couldn't find it anywhere. But most likely, it fell off before the accident and Prentiss never had another one put on."

"This Ira Wilson, who owned the land where the car crashed. Was he home the night of the accident?"

"Well, that's a funny thing," the sheriff said. "We thought he'd be home. A state trooper spotted that wreck in the woods right after dawn. We went to Ira's house to learn if he'd heard anything. We didn't really expect he did—there was a lot of thunder that night, and Ira don't hear too good, and besides, his house is a fair distance from the accident scene. But Ira wasn't there. His pickup truck was missing too. That worried us, because he hadn't told anyone he was going on a trip. We figured maybe he went off the road somewhere in that storm, too, and we put out a message on him. But he called in about noon, long-distance from a motel in Louisiana. He said he'd heard about the accident on the radio, and he just wanted us to know he was all right. He'd gone to Bonaparte on business, y'see."

"Bonaparte?"

"Yeah. Bonaparte, Louisiana. About two hundred miles from here. You keep going south on the road where Prentiss got killed, and you'll wind up right in Bonaparte."

Bennett stood before a public telephone in a Bonaparte drug store. He opened the Bonaparte telephone book to the classified pages and thumbed to the "Motel" listings.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He started down the list alphabetically. He called each motel, identified himself as an insurance investigator, and asked if an Ira Wilson had registered on April 15 or 16.

At the ninth motel he received an affirmative answer. Bennett hung up, went out to his car, and drove to the motel.

"Sure, I recall the man," the owner declared. "You say he filed a claim with your company six months ago? Reporting he's totally disabled?"

"That's right. Said he couldn't even walk without help."

"Well, the Ira Wilson who stopped here was an old guy all right, but he wasn't disabled. If it's the same man, he drove in here by himself in a pickup truck with Arkansas plates. I recall because it was such an odd hour—six in the morning—and he seemed a strange customer for a motel like ours, anyhow. But he had plenty of cash. He peeled a twenty from a real big roll."

"You got any idea where he was coming from? I'd like to find some other people who saw him walking around under his own power."

"I'll tell you about that. I was outside, picking up the morning newspapers, when he came along. I looked in his cab and saw blood on the seat, on the passenger side. I asked him what had happened and he got real sore. He said he'd just driven a friend who was sick up to the sanitarium. Well, I let him have a room. I was suspicious, though, so I called the sanitarium. But they said it was all right, that he had delivered a very sick friend there."

"What sanitarium is that?" Bennett asked.

"It's right up the road. The E. G. Bailey Sanitarium."

"Is Bailey a doctor?"

The motel owner laughed. "No, not E.G. He's got a doctor to run it, but E.G., he just put up the money. He puts up the money for a lot of things in Bonaparte, mister. He's just about the richest man around here."

"What's his main business?"

"E.G.," the motel man said, "is president of the bank."

"Well, thanks," Bennett said. "You've been a big help."

Bennett returned to his car and drove to downtown Bonaparte. He parked in front of E. G. Bailey's bank, which occupied a four-story building in the heart of town.

Bennett stepped from the car. He dropped a nickel into the parking meter and started toward the bank entrance. But when he was ten yards from the door, a man stuck his head from another parked car and yelled, "Hey, Ted."

Bennett turned. Gazing at him from behind the wheel of the car was Michael Dane James.

"I figured you'd get here sooner or later," James went on. "Let's take a ride. I know a place where they'll serve you a plate of soft-shelled

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

crab for a dollar. And beer is only twenty cents a bottle."

James backed the car from the curb and steered up Bonaparte's Main Street.

"How," Bennett asked gloomily, "did *you* get here?"

"You're an ingenious fellow," James conceded. "But you have no monopoly on ingenuity. Why do you think you're working for me, and not the other way around?"

"I never figured that out."

"I'm here," James said, "because the Bank of Bonaparte came to my attention in New Orleans. The actor Vann's trail ended there. But then I searched for some trace of Orloff's secretary, Irene Conover, who I assumed had been the woman Vann telephoned from Richmond. And sure enough, she'd arrived in New Orleans the day after Orloff disappeared from New York. Registered in a hotel under her own name, too, which indicates that this whole impersonation stunt must have been improvised. But the day after the Kansas City detective wrecked his car in Arkansas, Irene Conover vanished for twenty-four hours. She rented a car and drove off. When she came back, she gave the hotel manager a large sum of cash to be stored in the hotel safe overnight. The sum was so large that the manager noted the printing on the wrappers around the money—wrappers from the Bank of Bonaparte, Louisiana. And once I heard the magic word 'Bonaparte,' I got terribly interested in that bank. It would explain Orloff's mysterious ledger. Every 'Bonaparte' entry would represent a deposit in a dummy account in the Bank of Bonaparte. Because where else could anyone hide millions of dollars in a small town like Bonaparte, except in a bank?"

"I suppose," Bennett said, "you've already subjected E. G. Bailey, president of the bank, to the background check I was about to undertake."

"I have," James said. "E. G. Bailey, years ago, was a wildcatter in the Louisiana oil fields. His partner back in those days was none other than our old friend, Lou Orloff."

"Each, I imagine, went his own way," Bennett said, "Orloff into the intricacies of high finance, Bailey into small-town banking."

"Correct. But Orloff was probably a secret stockholder in that bank. At any rate, he must have set up the dummy accounts there, with his old friend Bailey's knowledge, planning later to transfer the money to South America. And that's why Orloff was heading for Bonaparte after he left Kansas City—to complete the transfer arrangements with Bailey. After which he intended to meet his secretary in New Orleans and then skip to Rio."

Bennett lit a cigarette. "What else have you been up to?"

"I just opened an account in the bank—as the James Sales Company.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sales of what, I'll leave to your imagination, just as I left it to the bank's. But it was a highly instructive afternoon. My initial deposit was big enough to command the attention of the highest echelon in the Bank of Bonaparte. And among other things I learned that E. G. Bailey has been out of town for three days. He's expected back later today, though, and I have an appointment to meet him at one p.m. tomorrow. But next Monday he's going out of town again. What happened to you?"

Bennett told James how he had followed Orloff's—and Wilson's—trail from Arkansas to Bonaparte.

James turned off the road and parked in front of a white frame restaurant.

"Here we are," James said. "But before we go in—describe for me, once more, that man Gordon who occupied the farm in Arkansas, the one who bought it from Ira Wilson."

Bennett did so.

"Well," James said, "in the back seat of this car is a manila envelope containing a photograph of E. G. Bailey. And unless I miss my guess, the man you saw on that farm was not a Mr. Gordon of Fort Smith. It was E. G. Bailey, the president of the Bank of Bonaparte."

Bennett reached back, opened the envelope, and looked inside.

"You're right," he said slowly. "Now, that's a funny way for a Louisiana bank president to spend his time—digging holes on a tract of bottomland in Arkansas."

"It sure is," James replied. He opened the door. "And it kind of brings all the pieces in this puzzle into place, too. Let's eat. Then you're going back to New Orleans, while I make inquiries of whatever local authorities handle vital statistics. I want you to buy me something in New Orleans. What you buy, I'm going to sell to E. G. Bailey when I see him tomorrow. It will be the one and only transaction of the James Sales Company. But it may wind up as the most important sale I ever made."

Sam Powell walked out of a hearing room in the Federal courthouse in Little Rock, Arkansas. Bennett and James were waiting in the corridor.

Powell shoved a cigar into his mouth and grinned. "It's going to take time to unravel the details, but we just got a look at Orloff's ledger. It shows there should be at least six million, maybe more, of that stolen money in the Bank of Bonaparte, under dummy names which Orloff and Bailey set up, and which our stockholders now stand an excellent chance of recovering. Not to mention the value of Orloff's diamonds."

James chuckled. "Poor old E. G. Bailey. He sure looked startled the other morning when Ted and I and those Federal marshals stepped from behind the Wilson farmhouse

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and caught him lugging that strongbox from the woods to his car."

"Poor Lou Orloff, you mean," Powell replied. "He spent a lifetime building up his house of cards. And then . . ."

"Then," Bennett said, "he wound up in a pauper's grave in Bonaparte, Louisiana, as John Doe."

The three men strolled down the hall and into an empty courtroom. They sat down. The hearing into Orloff's affairs would reconvene in half an hour.

"Orloff's death," James said, "was the direct result of his own greed and suspicion. Orloff was injured in that crash, but he was a strong and fearless man. He'd absorbed a number of bullets, once, and survived to win a medal. So he put the safety of his strongbox first, and his own welfare second. When he crawled out of that wrecked car and saw that Prentiss was dead, Orloff decided to hide his strongbox then and there. He wasn't about to let any stranger he might meet in the next few hours know about that strongbox—especially policemen who might turn up at any time to investigate the accident. And even if he persuaded someone, as he ultimately persuaded Ira Wilson, to drive him to the sanitarium in Bonaparte, he feared he might become unconscious during the ride, and the strongbox might be stolen. He was also afraid of being hospitalized in that sanitarium, perhaps anesthetized for hours at a time, with the strongbox lying around for anyone to pick up."

"As I understand it," Powell said, "Orloff pried a hubcap off the rear wheel of the wrecked car and used that as a digging tool to bury the strongbox on the Wilson farm."

"That's right," Bennett said. "Then, the strongbox taken care of, he finally gave some consideration to himself. He stumbled to Wilson's house and bribed Wilson to drive him to Bonaparte, to the sanitarium, where he knew Bailey could arrange to keep his admittance a secret, since Bailey owned the place. But the delay in seeking medical attention, plus his exertions in burying his strongbox, proved fatal. According to the doctor at the sanitarium, who talked readily enough when Federal authorities questioned him, Orloff died less than twelve hours later."

"He died," James added, "without disclosing the spot where he'd buried the box. Orloff did tell Bailey it was somewhere on the farm, though, and ordered Bailey to buy the farm and get Wilson off the property—to forestall Wilson's digging it up by accident. But Orloff had faith, to the end, that he'd recover from his injuries and dig up that strongbox himself."

"So Bailey," Bennett said, "posed as a man from Fort Smith and bought the farm. He also conceived the impersonation 'red herring'—the false Orloff—when the real Or-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

loff died. He realized that unless another Orloff turned up somewhere, the authorities would start tracing Orloff's movements from New York. They might learn about the accident in Arkansas, might start digging up the Wilson farm, too. Bailey conferred with Orloff's secretary. Both knew about the actor, Herb Vann. Bailey paid the secretary to find Vann and arranged for him to assume Orloff's identity in Rio for a few months. The villa in Rio had already been purchased, the secretary had Orloff's passport so everything was set. All that was necessary was for Vann to show up in Rio, with the secretary at his elbow to guide him over the rough spots."

"The purpose of the deception," James said, "was to give Bailey enough time to buy the farm, get Wilson moved off, and start digging for the strongbox on his own. That's how he was spending his time when Bennett showed up to investigate the accident—he was digging. It was a job he wanted to do alone. Like Orloff, he didn't trust anyone to help him. Because the strongbox now meant an awful lot to E. G. Bailey—as much as it had meant to Lou Orloff, when Orloff was alive. The diamonds inside were only a minor consideration. The big thing was, if Bailey could find and destroy Orloff's ledger, he could then transfer all that money from Orloff's dummy accounts into dummy accounts of his own, without fear that the ledger would ever turn up to trap him—a neat little gain of more than six million dollars, and no taxes. No wonder he was willing to spend a little money to maintain Vann as the false Orloff."

"As soon as we realized Gordon and Bailey were the same man," Bennett added, "the whole pattern became clear. Why else would Bailey buy the Wilson farm and spend his time digging alone, except to uncover that strongbox? And if Orloff had buried the box and after five weeks hadn't returned to dig it up himself, it almost certainly meant Orloff was unable to return, that he had probably died in the sanitarium."

Powell smiled. "It was nice of Bailey to find the box so quickly, while you two and those Federal marshals were hiding nearby. Bailey might have spent weeks poking around before he uncovered it."

"Well," James grinned, "we sort of *induced* its quick discovery, Sam. We staked out the farm that morning because we knew Bailey was going to find the box. He'd been searching with a shovel before. But when I met him back in Bonaparte, as the president of the James Sales Company, I used a little creative salesmanship on Mr. E. G. Bailey. I even made a twelve-dollar profit on the deal, Ted's expenses going to New Orleans and back for this item notwithstanding. I sold Bailey the very thing he needed most—a portable metal detector."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**RALEIGH BOND**
TITLE:	***Only the First Reading***
TYPE:	Crime Story
LOCALE:	New York City
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Vincent Reisner, the theatrical producer, had the backers, the theater, and all the cast except one—the father of the lead.*

UNTITLED ORIGINAL PLAY. PRODUCER: Vincent Reisner, 10-- West 75th Street. Still casting one character role. 30-40. Tall, well built, father type. Send photos and résumé to Mr. Reisner. Do not phone or visit the office." (Advertisement appearing in a New York theatrical newspaper.)

When Vincent Reisner woke up that morning he could hardly wait to begin the business of the day. He showered and shaved quickly, ate a fast breakfast, then carried his coffee into the living room and set it down on his desk. Lighting a cigarette he began to run through the photographs. Before him were nearly 100 eight-by-ten stills of a variety of actors in a variety of poses with a variety of expressions.

He held one up to catch the morning light streaming in through the window. For a full minute he studied the face as the ember of his cigarette grew brighter. The smoke escaped from his lips as he turned the photograph over and read the telephone number on the back. Then he reached for the phone.

"Hello. May I talk to John Mullaney, please? . . . Oh, Mr. Mullaney. This is Vincent Reisner, the producer. I received your picture and résumé in the mail and you seem to be just what I need at this time. I was wondering if you'd be available for an immediate audition? . . . How about today? . . . Well, I have an appointment this afternoon. Could it be this morning? . . . In about half an hour? Swell! Oh, by the way, the show might go on the road. Are you free to travel? . . . Good. Then I'll see

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you in about half an hour. Goodbye."

When the bell rang, Reisner opened the door to admit John Mullaney.

"Mr. Vincent Reisner?"

"Come in. You're Mullaney?"

"Yes."

"Sit down. I'll be right with you. Would you like some coffee?"

"Thank you. I didn't get a chance to have breakfast."

Reisner smiled. "I'm sorry if I rushed you. I'm on a tight schedule. Sit down. The pot is on. All I have to do is get the cups."

Mullaney sat on the couch and looked about the room. His eyes rested on the pile of photographs on the desk and his face took on a slight disappointment.

"I see you got quite a few answers to the ad." He had to raise his voice—Reisner had gone into the kitchen.

"About a hundred." Reisner got the cups out of the cabinet. "Of course I can't see everybody, so I'm just auditioning those who look the part."

And Mullaney looked the part fine, thought Reisner. Strong, tall frame. Distinguished gray hair. The right eyes, cold and unforgiving. Just like the father.

"I really appreciate the coffee," said Mullaney as Reisner came in with two steaming cups. "I'm not used to being up this early."

"Well, it was good of you to come on such short notice. From your willingness to travel I gather that you're not married."

"That's right."

Reisner settled back in his chair and sipped contentedly. "How long have you been in New York?"

"Just a few months. I came here from the Coast. Things are pretty dead out there. There was once a time when a character man could get work in pictures, but now all they want are kids. You know, teenagers and rock-and-rollers."

Reisner nodded sympathetically. "I know. Then I guess you don't know many people in town."

Mullaney removed the cup from his lips to shake his head. "No. I used to back in '52, but I've been away so long that everything has changed. New faces. New producers. I thought I'd be able to look up some old contacts, but . . ." He sighed and shrugged.

Reisner had already deduced all this from his study of Mullaney's résumé. So far everything checked perfectly.

They talked until the cups were empty. Mullaney had no close friends, no family. He hadn't told anyone that he was coming up for an audition—he didn't have time. Reisner decided that Mullaney was just the one he was looking for.

"John," he began, with the familiarity that producers immediately assume with actors, "I think you have a good chance of getting this part. Of course, I can't be definite until I've heard you read."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Naturally," said Mullaney. "How big a role is it?"

"The top character part. You'd play the father of the lead. It's a kind of villain type, which makes it the meatiest in the show."

He produced two frazzled manuscripts from the desk and handed Mullaney one of them.

"Here. Look it over—especially the third act. Then we'll try it a few times."

Mullaney studied the typed pages as Reisner continued to stare at him. After a while the actor looked up. "Looks like a powerful scene."

"It's the climax of the show. You see the plot. The father is a cruel and bitter man who has failed in everything he's tried. So he takes it out on his son. He blames the boy for his own failures and tries to transfer the guilt. All through the play the father needles the boy and belittles his efforts. Finally, the boy rebels and kills him."

"Very good. Who wrote it?"

"I did. I've been trying for years to get it produced. Now I've got the backers, the theater, and the rest of the cast. Want to give it a try?"

"I'd like to—very much."

They sat and read the scene aloud. Reisner read the son while Mullaney shouted his way through the father's part. At the end of the scene there was a long silence. Mullaney could sense Reisner's disappointment.

"Of course, it was only my first reading."

"No, you did fine," said Reisner quickly, and then he thought a moment. "I'll tell you what. Let's get on our feet. Move around. It'll help relax you. We'll use this room as the stage. You enter from the kitchen. I'll be sitting here reading. You improvise the business as you go along. Okay?"

They got up and walked it through. Then again. By the third try Mullaney was more relaxed and confident. He read with greater sensitivity, and there was now a quiet cruelty about the father, an inner savagery as he berated his son's weaknesses and drove the needle into the soft spots of his flesh.

Reisner felt better. Mullaney was going to do.

At the climactic moment the actor stood before Reisner. His voice was sadistic and cutting. Reisner picked up a heavy book from the desk and held it high.

"I'll kill you, father! I swear I'll kill you!"

Mullaney backed away to scream, as the script indicated, and then stopped.

"I'm sorry. I lost my place."

Reisner let the book down and dropped it on the desk.

"You were doing fine, too," he sighed.

"I'm sorry."

"Well, let's take it again. Remember, John, this is the most important moment of the show. Unless we see and feel the father's fear, unless he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

becomes absolutely terrified as the boy threatens to kill him, the whole scene is lost. Build everything up to that moment."

Mullaney nodded.

"Okay. Start from the top."

That night Reisner had the same dream. It wasn't often that it happened two nights in a row. He was home again, back in the terrible years of his adolescence. The crowded tenements of the lower East side weaved before his eyes and he could smell the dirt that only people without hope can create. The sound of his father's drunken footsteps coming through the dingy hall echoed in his ears.

"Still reading those damn books, eh?" his father sneered.

"Leave me alone, Pa. Go to bed."

"Don't tell me what to do! You ain't king around here!" He stumbled to the kitchen and got a dirty glass from the shelf. "What do you know about anything? What do you know how it's like?" He spat into the sink and then drank the whiskey he had poured into the glass. "Sittin' here all day and readin' those damn books. History of the The-ay-ter! Gonna be an actor! My God! Powder your nose and run around like a pansy in a pair of tights!"

"Leave me alone!"

"Why don't you be honest with yourself? You ain't never gonna be nothin'! You'll sit here and read those damn books till you die!"

"Go to bed!"

The old man chuckled. "You're my son, all right. We're alike, Vinnie my boy. We got the same thing inside of us. You know it as well as I do, but you're scared to admit it." He shoved the glass at the boy. "There's my legacy, boy. And there's your future!"

Vincent rose and held the heavy volume high over his head. "I'll kill you, Pa! I swear I'll kill you!"

The old man looked at him with blank eyes and then began to laugh. It started slowly and built into a mighty guffaw.

"You couldn't even do that right!"

Vincent looked at the book in his hand and then sat down to cry. His father's laughter grew louder and louder . . .

It echoed as the scene in the dream faded into the face of the neighbor who came to tell Vincent about the accident. His father hadn't seen the car. The driver had sounded his horn but the old man was too drunk to hear it. He fell in front of the bumper.

The neighbor rambled on and on, but all Vincent could hear was the laughter. They say you can't feel things in a dream, but the boy always felt the same sense of failure . . .

In the morning Reisner rose and again sped through his morning duties. Walking into the living room he noticed that the rug was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

still damp where he had cleaned up the stain, but the thick heavy book was neat and dry. He had been careful about not getting blood on the seats of the car and he was sure that no one had been on the highway last night when he carried the body into the woods.

Last night's dream was still haunting him as he sat down at his desk, lit a cigarette, and began leafing through the photographs. Then he reached for the phone.

"Hello. May I talk to Richard Johnson, please? . . . Oh, Mr. Johnson. This is Vincent Reisner, the producer. I received your picture and résumé in the mail and you seem to be just what I need at this time. I was wondering if you'd be available for an immediate audition?"

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Calvin, Henry	IT'S DIFFERENT ABROAD	Harper & Row	$3.95	5/8
Clifford, Francis	THE GREEN FIELDS OF EDEN	Coward-McCann	3.95	5/15
Cory, Desmond	UNDERTOW	Walker & Company	3.50	4/29
Curtiss, Ursula	THE WASP	Dodd, Mead & Co.	3.50	5/20
Derieux, James & Davenport, Walter	FORGER, CON-MAN, FAKER, THIEF: The Life and Times of Gaston B. Means	David McKay Co.	5.95	May
Dillon, Eilis	DEATH AT CRANE'S COURT	Walker & Company	3.50	4/29
Gault, William Campbell	DEAD HERO	E. P. Dutton & Co.	3.50	5/13
Gross, Gerald (editor)	MASTERPIECES OF MURDER	Little, Brown & Co.	6.50	May
Hare, Arnold	THE MAN WHO NEVER LAUGHED	W. W. Norton & Co.	3.95	4/24
Jeffries, Roderic	EVIDENCE OF THE ACCUSED	London House & Maxwell	3.50	May
MacKenzie, Donald	DOUBLE EXPOSURE	Houghton Mifflin Co.	3.75	5/9
Watson, Colin	HOPJOY WAS HERE	Walker & Company	3.50	4/29
Westlake, Donald E.	KILLY	Random House, Inc.	3.50	5/9
York, Jeremy	EDGE OF TERROR	Macmillan Company	3.50	May

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Allingham, Margery	POLICE AT THE FUNERAL	Macfadden Books	60¢	5/23
Eberhart, Mignon G.	HUNT WITH THE HOUNDS	Popular Library	40¢	5/7
Gonzales, John	FOLLOW THAT HEARSE	Gold Medal	40¢	4/30
Hobson, Francis	DEATH ON A BACK BENCH	Dolphin Books	95¢	5/3
MacDonald, John D.	ON THE RUN	Gold Medal	40¢	4/30
Packer, Vin	ALONE AT NIGHT	Gold Medal	40¢	4/30
Shearing, Joseph	THE STRANGE CASE OF LUCILE CLERY	Dolphin Books	95¢	5/3

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **GARY JENNINGS**

TITLE: ***Grease Job***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALES: Washington, D.C. and Falls Church, Va.

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The Keepers of the Keys had Dorotea, and Steve—"a Yanqui trader"—had only his special services to offer for Dorotea's life . . . an unusual story.*

STEVE SUAREZ SAT DOWN AT THE writing table by the window, took from its drawer a sheet of the hotel stationery, and wrote: *Dorotea.* He looked at this for a moment, sighed, and added: *querida.* Then he put down his pen and sat for a long time staring out at the heat waves shimmering over the bumper-to-bumper Washington traffic in the street below.

How was he to tell Dorotea that his latest bid for her freedom had meant just one more disappointment? This letter would undoubtedly be seen by various censors; it might be folly to anger them with a denunciation of their regime. And it would be cruel to imply that Dorotea's case was hopeless, or that he was giving it up. But he would be less than kind if he said that today's attempt had been any more successful than the ones before.

"Dorotea querida," he might write. "You are to them no more than a cigar, a banana, a bottle of rum . . ."

He had gone today for the fourth time to the unmarked brownstone building out near Chevy Chase—the three-man office known to refugees and hostages as Los Custodios de Los Llaves—The Keepers of the Keys. This time, at least, there had been no papers to fill out; they appeared to have exhausted all the maddening, frustrating forms-in-quintuplicate. This time, they had merely asked irrelevant questions and maliciously taunted his helplessness.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A cigar, a banana, a bottle of rum—or a citizen," said the tall, sour-faced one, who called himself Fulano, "is worth whatever we can get for it. Your Yanquis have always been great traders, Señor Suarez. Trading got them our sugar, Bolivia's tin, Venezuela's oil. All we ever got in return was the privilege of licking Uncle Sam's bootstraps while he hoisted himself to power. But even so ignorant *peónes* and *indios* learn after a while. Now we barter only when the trade is in our favor."

"You don't have to brainwash me," said Steve. "I was born and raised in the States. I never even saw your country until I went there to visit my grandparents—and met Dorotea. I don't want to help, hurt, or have your country, and I sure don't care what *you* do with it. Give me my girl and you can have the whole Caribbean, the whole Sud-America."

"As a born Yanqui, then," said the short smiling one, known as Mengano, "you won't begrudge our simple desire to make the best bargain we can." He grinned wickedly. "What will you give? A tractor? A patrol boat? A jet liner?"

"You know I've got nothing. I own a garage up in Pennsylvania and practically every lug wrench has its own separate mortgage. What can I offer—a free grease job?"

The senior member of the Custodios, the white-mustached Zutano, picked up a form from the bulky file folder and read from it: "Application for Immigrant Permit. Filed by Esteban Herman Suarez at Washington, D. C., Estados Unidos, in behalf of Señorita Dorotea Constancia Fuentes Garcia, presently resident in Ciempiés Province, People's Socialist Republic of—"

"Oh, spare me all that again!" Steve groaned in disgust.

Unperturbed, Zutano said, "You ask for the gift of one of our valued citizens, señor, but deem her worth nothing in exchange."

"Right," said Steve. "She's absolutely worthless. Nothing but a pretty girl. Doesn't know how to operate a Tommy gun or a riveting gun—no good at all in your workers' paradise. And she hates men with beards. The only thing she's good for is to come here and marry me."

Zutano picked up another form. "It says here you served the U. S. Army in Korea."

"Damn it, what's that got to do with anything?"

"It says you returned to the States with the rank of sergeant and served as instructor at a CBR school until your discharge."

"Okay. I still don't see what—"

"A CBR school, what is that?"

"Chemical-Biological-Radiological," Steve recited patiently. "But don't get any cute ideas. It's got nothing to do with A-bombs."

"What did you instruct?" Zutano persisted.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Steve shrugged. "Old-fashioned stuff. Demolition, flame throwers, booby trapping, gas mask drill. Vintage of World War I."

Zutano, Fulano, and Mengano exchanged glances, then all three stared at him in concert.

"I didn't see a secret weapon the whole time I was there," Steve went on. "I've got nothing you'd want—no stolen blueprints, no inside information—if that's what you're thinking."

"Then maybe *we* have nothing to trade," said the dour Fulano.

Zutano began shuffling together the file papers. "Your application will be conscientiously considered," he said, yawning. "Feel free to communicate with us if you think of any persuasions to add to your petition. *Buenas tardes, señor.*"

Steve said desperately, "I can't keep leaving my shop to come all the way—"

"Don't call us, we'll call you," chuckled Mengano, "whenever we need a grease job." He opened the office door. *"Buenas tardes, señor."*

Four hours later: "And that, darling Dorotea, was that," Steve said bitterly to the sheet of paper on the hotel table. But how could he write it down? How say that he would give anything in the world for her —when he had nothing whatsoever to give?

Steve could see no alternative to a trade. He was in the capital city of his nation, but there was no agency here he could persuade to help him forcibly abduct a citizen of a foreign power. He might, of course, go to the F.B.I. or somebody and expose the Custodios as rank extortionists and blackmailers. But he had no supporting evidence; he didn't even know the Custodios' real names. The aliases Zutano, Fulano, and Mengano merely represented the Spanish idiomatic equivalent of Tom, Dick, and Harry.

Suddenly he sat bolt upright as there came a knock at his room door. He turned Dorotea's letter face down before he went to unlock the door. Speak of the devils—there, smiling amiably, stood all three Keepers of the Keys. Steve made an effort not to show his mingled surprise, hopefulness, and uneasiness.

Mengano said archly, "We've come for a grease job."

"Come in," Steve said. "I'll phone room service for some grease. Rum, gentlemen—or vodka?"

They all sat around as sociably as four *compinches* getting set for a canasta game until the bellboy brought a bottle of rum and the usual accompaniments. They idly discussed the oppressive Washington weather and the possibility of a merciful thunderstorm to break the heat. Not until the boy was gone and Steve had handed around tall rum-and-tonics did Zutano broach the reason for the unexpected visit.

"We have discussed your application, Señor Suarez," he said blandly, "and decided that you are right.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Señorita Dorotea García is of no value to our young republic." Steve's unbelieving heart began to lift. "But *you* are," added Zutano, and Steve's heart stopped cold in its ascent.

"You have nothing to trade for the girl," said Mengano. *"Bueno.* We give her to you on credit, and you can work off the obligation."

"You are capable of rendering a service," said Fulano, "which we are capable of appreciating."

Steve gazed inscrutably at each of the men in turn before he said with husky-voiced sarcasm, "Who do I murder?"

"Caray, how you talk!" Mengano chided him, looking sincerely hurt. "We intend no murder."

"That's what I'm afraid of," Steve said wryly. "I almost wish it was something that simple. Okay, what is it?"

"We wish you to arrange an act of God," said Zutano.

A first tentative mumble of thunder came in from the twilit outdoors. The three Custodios turned as one and grinned at the window.

"Tell him, Zutano," said Mengano with a giggle.

Zutano cleared his throat importantly, and told him, "Among the criminals who fled our country, when the *Movimiento Revolucionario* abolished the dictator, was a certain—ah—Minister X. Instead of being satisfied to escape with his miserable skin, this Minister X has holed up here and is agitating unceasingly against the people's republic. The Bahía de Puercos invasion was partly done at his instigation, but its failure has not deterred him from further attempts at atrocious assault. He is the focus, the magnet for every anti-Revolutionary malcontent outside our borders. He wields influence with the Yanqui departments of intelligence and inter-American policy. In short, he is a thorn in our national flesh."

"In short," said Steve, "he is the ex-Minister—" and he mentioned the name.

Zutano looked unhappy. "Do you know him?"

"Only from the newspapers."

Zutano's frown cleared. "Ah, that is all right, then. We could not ask you to deal with a personal acquaintance."

"You can't ask me to kill a public figure, either."

"We don't want him *killed,*" Mengano corrected him again.

Fulano had been regarding Steve through slitted eyes. Now he sneered, "Are we talking to a man with—scruples? Is it ethics, Señor Suarez—or something else—that you shy from the suggestion of violence?"

In one move Steve was at Fulano's chair and had lifted the man out of it with one hand. "Would you care to test my scruples about violence?" he grated, cocking the other fist.

"Basta! Enough!" ordered the white-mustached Zutano. "Señor

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Suarez, have the goodness to put down the Custodio Fulano."

The man was released, to drop heavily back into his chair. He sat muttering, glaring hatefully and rearranging his clothes.

Steve told them all, in a flat cold voice, "I don't care whether the Minister lives or dies, or whether you do, either. All that matters to me is the girl Dorotea Garcia, and I'll do whatever is necessary to get her—except the stupidly impossible. You want me to put the arm on an international statesman, right here in the capital Who do you think I am—Zorro? I couldn't get near him."

Zutano plucked at his mustache. "To assassinate the Minister would do us more harm than good. It would make a martyr of him, and solidify his following. We want him removed by divine—" He was interrupted by a roll of thunder, quite close now.

Mengano rubbed his hands and said with glee, "There, the *tronada!* That's what we want!"

"A thunderstorm?" Steve asked.

"Lightning," said Zutano, and a flash of it lighted the window right on cue. "Or a reasonable facsimile." He pointed across the street to the windows of the apartment hotel that stood opposite.

"From here," he said to Steve, "could you hit someone in those rooms with a—how do you say?—*un tirador de flama?*"

"A flame thrower?" Steve gasped.

"Si!" Mengano enthusiastically chipped in. "In the middle of a thunderstorm. It will be thought he was struck by lightning. No murder, no martyr, no suspicion on anybody. Our enemies will see that God is on our side."

"You're all out of your minds," Steve said incredulously.

Zutano shook his head. "Strangely enough, audacity is sometimes the better part of discretion. Death by lightning can be bizarre. Sometimes it stops the victim's heart action without so much as curling his hair. Sometimes it shrivels him to a raisin. Sometimes it broils him—as by a flame thrower."

While Steve gaped, Zutano went on to sketch the scene of the crime. "The Minister's neighbors are all indoors, sheltering from a thunderstorm just like the one going on out there now. At the height of the storm they see a flare of flame outside—startlingly near, but its source is taken for granted. Sometime after the storm is long over—and we are long gone—they find the old man scorched to death in an apartment that shows other evidence of a flash fire. What are they to think?"

"They *might* think they smell gasoline!" Steve blurted. "A flame thrower doesn't spit an electric arc. And what are they to think if the Minister's whole apartment building burns down? It's just as likely to."

"Not if you are the expert we think you are," said Fulano. "From

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pictures I have seen of the device in action, it can be variously adjusted. You will adjust it so that only the outermost lick of flame laps the Minister, thereby not scattering gobbets of fuel about the room, and also minimizing the danger of a general fire."

"You kooks are really serious about this," Steve said, in something like awe. "Suppose there are no more storms this summer? Suppose the only storm comes when the Minister isn't at home? Suppose something goes haywire with the mechanism and I splash fire all over the District of Columbia?"

"Dorotea querida . . ." Zutano broke in. He had found the letter and read the only two words on it. "I shall ask you just the one question, Señor Suarez. Weigh your answer carefully. Do you wish to see this girl ever again?"

As commanded, Steve weighed it carefully. What they proposed was unspeakable. But his alternative—the loss of Dorotea—was unthinkable. At last he took a deep breath and said, "Where do we get the machine? How do we set the scene?"

The next afternoon Mengano came with a car and drove Steve across the river to the Virginia suburb of Falls Church.

"As you will see," he explained on the way, "your Yanquis treat the Minister rather shabbily, denying him the protection of secret agents or anything of the sort. They consider it sufficient to sequester him in a motel apartment out here. He has only a single attendant, another defecting countryman who doubles as his secretary and bodyguard."

"Is this guy with him all the time?" Steve asked.

"Sometimes he runs errands. But no one will regret it if he happens to be in the apartment at the—critical moment."

The driveway entrance of the Blue Ribbon Motel was on a busy four-lane highway, but Mengano turned off this and up a narrower, quiet side street. The motel was an aggregation of separate one-story cottages, a row of which ran along the right side of the street, their rear windows even with the sidewalk. Mengano parked the car on the left side of the street and indicated the cottage opposite.

"That one's his. And we are here." He jerked his thumb at the building before which they had parked.

They got out of the car and crossed the sidewalk to the foyer, Steve unobtrusively casing the lay of the land. The building they entered was a four-story apartment house of pale-beige brick, obviously newly erected; most of the window sills wore the glazier's crosses and all but two of the mail boxes in the foyer were still empty of name tags.

"Lucky, huh?" said Mengano, as he pushed the bell button below the box innocuously labeled Sanders.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"One of our—ah—*simpáticos* was able to lease the second-floor front."

The foyer door buzzed and clicked open. They went through a small lobby and up a flight of stairs. Zutano and Fulano were waiting in the apartment. The front room had venetian blinds and draperies at the big windows, but was innocent of furnishings except for a telephone sitting on the floor and a big cardboard carton.

"Bienvenido!" Zutano greeted them. "A perfect set-up, no?"

"I've seen better," Steve grunted. "As long as you went to all this trouble, why didn't you take the downstairs apartment?"

"It was already rented," said Fulano. "How much luck do you expect? But the people down there are the only others in the building so far. There's nobody up above to peek down on what you do."

"What's your complaint?" asked Zutano.

Steve beckoned him to the window. "To hit the Minister's cottage I've got to angle down. That's a tough trajectory to figure. What's worse, he'll have to be practically flattening his nose on the windowpane for me to see him."

"Hm," said Zutano. "Is it absolutely necessary that you hit him directly?"

"No-o," Steve said meditatively. "But I *would* like to be sure he's in the room before I start heating it up."

"I suppose we'll have to leave things partly up to Providence," Zutano said piously. "Do you want to examine your equipment?"

Fulano and Mengano were laboriously unpacking the heavy olive-green machinery from the carton. "Tools for the grease job," Mengano giggled.

"It's been a long time," Steve said almost fondly, as he knelt beside the weapon. "Fully loaded," he muttered, hefting it experimentally. He pulled the hoses out of the excelsior and examined the nozzle.

"Are you sufficiently familiar with it?" Zutano asked anxiously.

"Standard GI hotfoot," said Steve, pointing to the U. S. Army stencil. "Where'd you get it, anyway?"

"It was presented to us at the Bahía de Puercos," Fulano said with a smirk.

Steve said, "Feel around in the box and see if you find a sparker—a little gismo shaped like a tongs. I want to check out this gas cartridge."

Mengano scrabbled through the excelsior and came up with a small wire contraption.

"That's it," said Steve. He turned a petcock near the nozzle, and squeezed the wire tongs. A flutter of sparks resulted and with a whispered *phsst,* a tiny blue flame suddenly appeared. The three Custodios cursed and leaped convulsively away.

"Los tres bravos," Steve chuckled contemptuously, as he turned off

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the flame. "That's just the pilot light." He noted without too much surprise that each of the men had whipped out a pistol in the spasm of excitement.

"For your own safety," Zutano warned, "you had better keep us apprised of what you are doing."

Steve stepped to the window again, to calculate the distance between him and the Minister. Fulano spoke up, "I paced it off early this morning. From the building wall right under our window here to the cottage window is exactly fifty-four paces."

"Call it a hundred and thirty-five feet," Steve said to himself. "Then add a bit for the angle . . ."

"What happens next?" asked Mengano.

"Nothing happens," Steve told him, "until you produce Dorotea."

Zutano smiled beatifically. "I cabled last night, Señor Suarez. Unless your lady is one of those who take forever to get dressed, she should be leaving there sometime today. As soon as she lands in Florida, she'll be put on a flight for Washington."

"Good enough," said Steve. "Then the next thing is to try out the flame thrower."

"Try it out?" exclaimed Zutano and Mengano.

Fulano suspiciously demanded, "Are you thinking of some trick to give the show away?"

"Amigos," Steve patiently explained, "I've got to find out what kind of gasoline compound is in that tank—whether it's liquid or napalm. For all I know, it may have turned to Jell-O by now. I've got to make sure the tank of compressed nitrogen hasn't lost its kick. Even if everything is still in combat condition, I've still got to adjust the nozzle for a fine stream, figure the duration of burst, and do a little target practice. If I don't, we may light up Falls Church like a refinery explosion."

Zutano chewed on his mustache. "But where can we go to play with a *triquitraque* like this?"

"Any of you know where the city dump is?" Steve asked. "They always have incinerators and bonfires going. If the place is big enough, we wouldn't be noticed."

It was plenty big enough, a bleak wasteland that looked like the back yard of Hell. Rolling hillocks of trash, scum, jetsam, filth, and debris stretched away seemingly to the horizon. The entire area was overhung by a pall of greasy smoke from innumerable smoldering fires among the rubbish, and by an almost tangible pall of fetid stench. On the nearer fringes of this dreary desert, where the latest garbage trucks had dumped their cargoes, a scattering of scavengers picked listlessly through the reeking heaps. Steve and the Custodios pushed on beyond these pitiful pickers into the interior.

Fulano and Mengano, who car-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ried the seventy-pound carton of equipment between them, cursed and sweated as they staggered through the litter. Zutano followed, holding his nose with one hand and lifting the cuffs of his trousers out of the mess with the other. Steve shepherded the protesting crew along until they were out of sight of anything but the hordes of gulls and rats that lived in the dump.

"Gah-h-h!" Fulano retched. *"Por cierto,* we'll all die of the miasma! The Minister will have an easy end by comparison."

Steve ignored him and began professionally to assemble his weapon. When he slipped his arms into the web straps and stood up, he tottered slightly under the unaccustomed weight. The others forgot their distress and watched with interest; this time they didn't flee when he ignited the little blue pilot flame. From his hip pocket Steve pulled a pair of welder's tinted goggles and heavy work gloves. Donning them, he said brusquely, "Stand behind me," and the Custodios scuttled to obey.

Steve gave a fraction of a twist to two separate valves on the tanks at his back. The twin hoses that led to the nozzle went *sss-thunk* and writhed briefly as if with a sudden access of evil energy. Steve took a last cautionary look around and lifted the nozzle.

There was a noise like the frenzied flapping of incredibly vast blankets of velvet, and an awesome monster bloomed out above them.

"Perdición!" said Zutano, cowering in the glare and furnace heat. A thousand gulls rose shrieking and sped away.

Steve had produced a pear-shaped burst that boiled up some sixty feet, a Halloween goblin of brilliant orange streaked with rusty black. He held it for only three or four seconds, then the pear shape collapsed in on itself in a turmoil of greasy smoke. But just that brief burst left the four men sweltering as if they stood in an oven, and the black smoke cloud hung together like a living entity, churning angrily as it drifted away over the dump.

"Maldito!" swore Fulano. "I think my eyebrows are singed."

"Now you see why I wanted to practice," Steve said calmly, as he made adjustments to his equipment. "You wouldn't have wanted to set *that* loose on the Blue Ribbon Motel."

He gestured them behind him again and held the nozzle out at just a slight angle above the horizontal. This time the noise was of the giant velvet blankets being savagely ripped. A stream shot out from the nozzle like water from a hose, but this was blindingly yellow-white. It arced out a hundred feet and splashed all over a hillock of corroded tin cans.

But when Steve released the trigger, the stream did not just sag and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

quit, like hosed water. As if it had been given a separate life of its own, the jet simply disengaged itself from the nozzle and finished its sizzling arc unassisted. When the final splatter subsided, the heap of tin cans was glowing cherry-red; a few flames continued to smolder sullenly here and there, where their labels had caught fire.

"That's better," said Steve. He opened the nitrogen pressure valve another fraction of a turn and made some delicate refinements to the nozzle setting. Then he turned to Fulano and said invitingly, *"Hágame un favor, señor.* Walk straight out there—the fifty-four paces you measured."

Fulano turned pale for an instant, then purpled with rage and spat a malediction of fulminating Spanish. Steve laughed and assured him that he would withhold the fire. Fulano glanced at his fellows and found them grinning, too. With a final all-around curse he stomped off, staggering among the shifty heaps of trash.

At the end of his fifty-four paces he turned and yelled, "To this wooden crate right here!" Then he doubled over in a crouch and ran a broken-field sprint back to the other three. Steve thanked him politely—at which the panting Fulano merely glared—and aimed the nozzle again.

He didn't have to try twice. The yellow-white jet seethed out in a flatter trajectory this time. It separated from the nozzle before its other end had touched the mark, and for an unbelievable instant was leaping the hundred and thirty-five feet entirely on its own, like a thrown javelin. When it hit, the crate exploded into a geyser of flaming splinters. The three Custodios looked at Steve with a sort of appalled respect.

"Better yet," said Steve. "Hardly any smoke at all, now."

"Can we go then?" whined Mengano. "The stink here is turning my stomach."

"Deténgase!" said Fulano suddenly, pointing off among the rubble and slowly taking out his revolver. *"Mira,* a Yanqui rat has come to spy." He thumbed the hammer of his pistol and carefully drew down on the ugly animal that peered at them from a heap some fifty feet away. Fulano fired; several tin cans jerked and jumped among the trash, but the rat continued insolently to stare.

Fulano growled one of his usual oaths and started to take aim again. Then he recoiled wildly as a frizzing spear of white fire lunged out from directly beneath his uplifted arm. The rat vanished—vaporized.

"Servidor de usted," said Steve, with a mocking bow, as he slipped out of his harness. "That ought to do it, gentlemen. We don't want to use up all the juice."

Zutano had his head raised to the sky. They all followed his gaze and saw the bloated gray clouds piled

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from horizon to zenith. Even as they looked, a blink of lightning laced through them. "Must be raining already, back in town," said Mengano. They lowered their heads to look at Steve.

"No dice," he said firmly. "You know the bargain. It's not that I don't trust you boys but, being a shrewd Yanqui buyer, I'll insist on waiting until the goods arrive before I make payment."

Zutano shrugged philosophically. "Well, in weather like this, I suppose we can count on a *tronada* almost every night now."

When they had made their painful way back to the car, Fulano slipped behind the wheel and Zutano told him, "Drive back to Washington." To Steve he said, "We'll stop by your hotel. Pick up whatever you need in the way of personal gear and we'll come back for you. Meanwhile, Mengano, you buy some air mattresses. We'll all be staying at the Falls Church apartment from now until the job is done."

When they arrived there, near midnight, the telephone was ringing. Zutano picked it up from the floor, spoke quietly, listened for a while and then said, "Miss, would you mind repeating that message? Just a moment." He held out the phone to Steve.

"Western Union," a girl's voice said in a monotone, "a full-rate telegram for Mr. Esteban Suarez, reads as follows, 'Darling, stop. Million thanks for sending Mr. Sanders, stop. Staying here tonight, arrive Washington two o'clock tomorrow afternoon, stop. Will call immediately, stop. Love, full stop.' The message is signed Dorotea and was wired from Miami, Florida."

"Sanders is the code name used by all our *cofrades*," said Zutano, when Steve put the phone down.

"He writes a nice love letter," Steve said drily. "Until I hear from Dorotea in person, I don't touch that machine again."

The next day dawned just as hot and muggy as the whole week had been. The four men rose stiff and surly from their air mattresses. Mengano went out to a diner and brought back coffee and buns. When Fulano started to light an after-breakfast cigar, Steve stopped him.

"That thing has started leaking gasoline fumes since it's been used. Smell it? From now on, as long as we're shut up in here with it, you go outdoors whenever you want to smoke. Mengano, you go check that stove in the kitchenette and make sure the pilot light is off."

The Custodios obeyed without demur; they had seen what the *tirador de flama* could do.

After a period of walking about the bare rooms with nothing to do but look at each other and the blank walls, one of the men produced a deck of cards. Mengano went out

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

again, this time for beer, and the four of them sat down to a desultory nickel-and-dime poker game. This was still in progress when two o'clock came and went.

"Maybe she forgot daylight saving time or something," Mengano suggested.

"Be just our luck the Florida immigration people have held her up," grunted Fulano.

"She'll call," Zutano said complacently. "And so will I—kings and threes." He fanned out his hand and raked in the little pile of coins.

The other men threw down their cards with a general grumble. The grumble was immediately echoed and amplified by faraway thunder. The three Custodios scrambled to their feet and made for the window.

"Qué gusto!" crowed Zutano. "It's getting black as night. Señor Suarez, come here."

Steve got to the window just in time to see a light go on in the cottage across the street. An elderly man with a gray beard stuck out his head and cocked it to peer worriedly up at the stormy sky. When he ducked back in again, he pulled down the sash.

"The window is shut," Mengano whispered anxiously.

"It won't matter," Steve assured him. "The heat will smash it without even slowing up."

"And if he is not near the window?" asked Fulano. "If the fire does not touch him?"

"It will instantly exhaust all the air in the room," said Steve. "In the whole cottage. He will inhale flame-hot gases. It will kill him just as suddenly and surely as real lightning could." He looked down uneasily at the waiting weapon, then at the eager faces of his roommates. "No," he said. "Not until I hear from Dorotea."

"Peste!" muttered Zutano, as the rain began to fall in bullet-sized drops. "What's delaying the woman?"

Half an hour later the storm was in full fury, strafing the windows with fusillades of water and battering the walls with rams of thunder. At intervals of not more than seventy seconds, explosions of lightning would reveal the little cottage across the way, seeming to crouch and cringe in foreknowledge of doom. The Custodios fidgeted, cursed, paced, and pleaded with Steve. He hardly noticed them, torn as he was between the fear that Dorotea would never call and a growing horror of what he was obliged to do if she did.

The storm was making such a fearful clamor that the phone rang twice before they heard it. The Custodios cheered and stood aside for Steve to answer.

"Esteban! O Esteban, querido!" Despite the storm static in the earpiece, there was no mistaking Dorotea's soft voice, or its nearness. "I'm sorry I'm late. We had bumpy weather."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Are you all right, Dorotea?" he asked urgently. "Are you really here? Really free?"

"Realmente!" she said happily, then, not so happily, "I had to leave a great deal behind—"

"Never mind that now," Steve cut in, as Zutano gestured impatiently. "We'll talk later. Dorotea, I want you to go straight to my hotel —the Sherwood Hotel on M Street, Northwest—and wait for me there."

"Will this—Señor Sanders let me go where I please?"

"Yes. I'll tell him in a minute. I've got a little job to do, sweetheart. But it will only take about an hour, and I'll see you at the Sherwood then. Put Sanders on now, and you get moving."

Steve covered the receiver and said to Zutano, "You heard. Tell it to your *cofrade* or the deal's off."

Zutano said, "Why not?" and, into the phone, "Yes, it's all right, Sanders. Leave the girl to her own devices, and you meet us at the office in an hour or so. *Buen éxito. Hasta luego."*

Zutano put down the instrument with his left hand and turned with a revolver in his right. Steve glanced at the other men and found two more guns pointed at him. Zutano's eyes glittered as he said, "No more quibbling, señor. We have done our part, the storm is still doing its part. Now you do yours —or die this instant."

As he knelt beside the flame thrower, Steve felt a relief akin to gratitude, for the Custodios' threatening gesture. It was no longer necessary to think of these three as the rescuers of his Dorotea. With guns in their hands they were just so many cold-blooded killers.

He raised the venetian blind a foot from the sill, then slid the sash up the same distance. Cool rain splashed in on his fevered face. A stab of lightning briefly illumined the cottage below, then darkness hid all but its rectangle of a yellow-lit window. Steve returned to the equipment and painstakingly worked the gadgets on the tanks, then lifted the nozzle and aimed it across the sill.

"Splendid, so far," Zutano whispered behind him. "But just in case you have any remote idea of turning that hose against us, let me give you fair warning. We are all sufficiently terrified of your weapon that the slightest movement in this direction will earn you at least three fast bullets. You would never complete the turn."

"At this range," Fulano added, with detestation in his voice, "I don't miss the rat."

Steve felt the skin on his back twitch as if it was trying to thicken against the threatened impact. He swallowed a lump in his throat and said, as clearly and loudly as he could, "Before you shoot, señores, look down at your feet."

When he was answered by nothing but shocked silence, he dared to turn his head. The three men were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

staring down at the widening pool of viscous liquid that flowed from the drain valve Steve had opened in the fuel tank. A rivulet of it touched Fulano's shoe and he jerked his foot away. The reek of gasoline was fast filling the room like a fog. Steve's eyes smarted.

"You've seen what that stuff will do," he said, as he slowly stood up beside the window. "Believe me, the muzzle flash of a pistol shot will ignite it. So will this."

The men looked up with glazed eyes, and Steve showed them the little wire sparker in his hand.

"I'm walking out of here now," he went on, sliding edgewise around the room. "If one of you tries to jump me, all I have to do is squeeze gently . . ."

He raised the spark tongs and the men quailed.

They remained still and silent, though the pistol muzzles swiveled after him. When he reached the door he said, "Pray that the lightning doesn't come close." Then he jerked it open, jumped through, and slammed it behind him. He went down the stairs in half a dozen leaps and hurled himself through the lobby door into the foyer.

For a fleeting moment he thought of letting them live. But they were certain to do one of two things: either gun him down from the apartment window, or telephone to have some other *cofrade* grab Dorotea at the hotel, which would put him right back in their power.

Steve sternly shook his head and murmured, "Father, forgive us all," and leaned on the bell button labeled Sanders.

The men upstairs never heard it; the first battery spark deafened them forever, as the apartment interior erupted out over the street in a flash brighter than the brightest lightning.

Steve stayed where he was, in the shelter of the foyer, until the hot shards of window glass and fragments of plaster ceased falling. Then he hurried out of the building and down the rainswept street toward the highway, headed for the city and Dorotea.

CLASSIFIED

Rates $1.00 per Word

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

Assemble Artificial Lures at Home for stores. Material supplied Free. Profitable! Write: Lures, Ft. Walton Beach, Fla.

I made $40,000.00 Year by Mailorder! Helped others make money! Start with $10.00—Free Proof. Torry, Box 3566-T, Oklahoma City 6, Okla.

RARE BOOKS

Out of print mysteries? Our Specialty. Aardvarks Book Detectives, Box 668, San Diego 12, California.

True Crime. World's largest o.p. stock Big catalog, 25¢. Patterson Smith, Box B-Q, East Orange, N.J.

STAMP COLLECTORS

World's lowest price list — U.S. — Mint and Used — priced per one — get yours now — FREE — Wm. Rice, 10230-Z, Martinique Dr., Perrine 2, Fla.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kenneth L. Roberts was one of America's finest historical novelists. He was noted for the extent and accuracy of his painstaking research, and his ARUNDEL, RABBLE IN ARMS, *and* NORTHWEST PASSAGE *brought him an immense reputation.*

Before he began his series of historical novels, Mr. Roberts experimented with many other forms of writing, including the crime story. "The Bottle Mine" comes from Mr. Roberts' curious book titled ANTIQUAMANIA, *with "Illustrations, Elucidations and Woodcuts by Booth Tarkington."*

Now, meet Whitney Leet, a bottle specialist, who in his antique collecting could become "as hard-boiled and cunning as a gunman under the influence of opiates."

THE BOTTLE MINE

by KENNETH L. ROBERTS

ANTIQUE COLLECTORS DEVELOP strange and sometimes unpleasant traits. Certain forms of antique collecting, furthermore, seem to bring out these traits with unusual virulence. The collecting of curly maple frequently makes a collector wholly unreasonable and irresponsible. The collecting of Currier & Ives prints occasionally brings out his stubbornness and miserly traits. The collecting of pewter is apt to accentuate his indecision and vacillation. The collecting of early pine is likely to develop his intolerance and conceit; while the collecting of fine Chippendale furniture is more apt to bring out his boastfulness and arrogance.

Worst of all, however, in the development of hidden and unsuspected traits, is the collecting of early American glass and bottles. Such collecting, in many cases, works as insidiously on the character of the collector as did the hellish liquors that were so often contained in the bottles.

Why it should be so, I do not know. The fact remains that one can never tell about the bottle specialist. He may be normal as any other collector; and then again, beneath an impassive and seemingly harmless exterior, there may lurk a relentlessness of purpose and a cruelty that would shock and horrify a Chicago detective sergeant.

Whitney Leet was one of America's greatest bottle specialists. His knowledge of glass was so extensive that he refused to purchase any of the glass known as Stiegel unless he could get it at five-and-ten-cent

From "Antiquamania," by Kenneth Roberts. Copyright 1928 by Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc.; renewed; reprinted by permission of the publishers.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

store prices, inasmuch as he knew there are nineteen glass factories in existence able to make a grade of glass that Baron Stiegel could not have told from his own products.

In the matter of bottles, however, Leet made no effort to control himself at any time. He frequently traveled halfway across the continent to look at an amethyst or blue whiskey flask of unknown origin or unusual design; and from the prices that he occasionally paid for such flasks, one might have thought that they were going to yield a return of 25 per cent a year for the remainder of his days.

In his home life he was gentle and kindly; but when he embarked on the trail of a rare flask, he became as hard-boiled and cunning as a gunman under the influence of opiates.

If a friend or an acquaintance attempted to vie with him in the purchase of a desirable flask, Leet became almost ferocious in his attitude. He never resorted to kicking or biting at such moments, so far as was known; but he had no hesitation in treading heavily on the tender portion of a foot, or of thrusting himself rudely in front of other people.

I would, however, have suspected him of no greater infraction against good taste and decency if Leet himself had not called me to him early in the spring and told me the harrowing tale of Bill Swiggert and the Bottle Mine.

It seems that the late autumn had found Leet nervously exhausted from the intensive hunt for early American flasks in which he had indulged during the preceding summer and spring. Instead of hunting leisurely through the countryside, as he had been accustomed to do in his early days of flask hunting, he had been obliged to compete with such energetic newcomers in the field of bottle collecting as Joseph Hergesheimer and Edwin Le Fevre, whose squirrel-like activities had forced him to use high-pressure methods of the most exhausting nature in order to keep abreast of them, to say nothing of occasionally putting himself a jump or two in advance of them.

Haggard and worn by his strenuous toil, Leet determined to banish all thoughts of flasks and bottles from his mind for several months, and to travel to California through the soft warmth of the great Southwest, where the burning rays of the seldom-obscured sun scorch the poisons of fatigue from Eastern bones and brains; and where antiques, in the true sense of the word, are unknown.

Occasionally, in the West and Southwest, Leet knew, one encountered a so-called antique shop. Its stock, Leet had further learned, invariably consisted of the least desirable types of Empire furniture; while post-empire black walnut chairs and sofas, with bunches of grapes carved promiscuously on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their frames, were assiduously sought by the so-called antique collectors who lived in those sections.

Consequently, he embarked on his trip secure in the knowledge that he would be tempted to indulge in none of the exhausting hunts for antiques that had made life in more effete sections of America so strenuous and debilitating. As a matter of precaution, however, he carried with him an amethyst Corn For The World flask, so that it could be exhibited as a sample in any section where the need of investigating the flask situation should arise.

Leet traveled by roadster, driving himself and without companions. From Chicago he drove southwest to San Antonio, Texas. He made a perfunctory inquiry for flasks in San Antonio, but found only one repulsive-looking Masonic flask in the most offensive brown glass.

He struck the Mexican border at Laredo, and then turned westward into the face of the setting sun, constantly acquiring new strength and vigor from the warm, dry air that blew across the endless seas of mesquite, and resting his shattered nerves on the flawless and—to Eastern eyes—untraveled roads that carried him ever westward through Eagle Pass, Del Rio, the Big Bend country, and past the barren hills and the towering smelters of El Paso into New Mexico and the purple mountains of southern Arizona.

It was late on a hot December night that his car coasted down the hill slopes of the mining town of Douglas. Parched by his dusty ride, Leet forbore even to stop at the hotel to secure a room, but pressed on another half mile and crossed the border into Agua Prieta to revel in the dry Martinis and the brimming beakers of beer that, for Americans, surround even the most tawdry and dirty of the Mexican border towns with an atmosphere of romance and old-world quaintness.

The Boston Bar and Café, which Leet entered, was entertaining a group of Douglas businessmen, who had laid down their bridge hands in the Elks Club for a moment, according to their usual after-dinner custom, and hastened over to Agua Prieta for their second drink of the evening. Shortly after Leet's entrance they hastened back to their bridge games in the Elks Club; and Leet found himself alone before the bar, except for a single morose individual in flannel shirt and overalls, who gazed gloomily at a bottle of Mexican rye whiskey and occasionally helped himself to a drink from it.

In the course of time Leet struck up a conversation with the morose individual by asking his opinion of the Mexican whiskey that he was absorbing. It was, the overalled man said, neither good nor bad; merely drinkable. Leet, though slightly repelled by his gloominess, invited him to dine with him, and the two of them wrestled with a beefsteak that for thickness and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

toughness—like most of the beefsteaks in the great southwestern cow country—rivaled a sheet of crêpe rubber.

It developed, during the dinner, that the gloomy person's name was Bill Swiggert and that he was a prospector. He had, he revealed, combed through the Huachuca Mountains and the Continental Divide in search of metals of a more or less precious nature until his interior had taken on the character of the country. He came out of the mountains after a prospecting trip, he said, like the Copper Queen of Bisbee—like a big blue hole in the ground: a copper-lined hole.

That was why, he explained, he always purchased a bottle of Mexican rye whiskey when he entered a Mexican bar for drinking purposes. Anything less would be as devoid of chemical action as spraying a cupful of beef tea into a copper boiler with a perfumery atomizer.

Leet ventured the statement that his road to California led him through the ancient mining section of Arizona—through, in particular, Tombstone. Tombstone, Leet opined, must be a strange and wonderful sight, deserted and redolent of vanished glories.

Bill Swiggert remarked that Leet would be surprised. Tombstone, he said, was just like any other place except that the old front of the Birdcage Theatre was still standing. Outside of that, there were just as many people hanging around doing nothing as there were anywhere else in southern California or the Southwest. Everybody had a Chevrolet or a Buick or a Ford; and the high-school girls wore silk stockings and skirts just as short as anywhere else, and gave passing tourists the eye without meaning anything, the way they do in Ohio and Iowa, and so on.

For real spooky sights, Swiggert said, you had to go back into the mountains and look at some of the real deserted camps through which he had traveled and in which he had frequently resided, alone except for his pack mule, for weeks at a time—such camps, for example, as Canned Tomato, Full of Hell, Soak Hollow, Sinful, and Parboil. In some of these camps, declared Swiggert, they must have devoted themselves almost exclusively to drinking, if such remaining signs of human habitation as whiskey bottles could be trusted.

At this point Leet excused himself and went to his automobile. From one of the side pockets he took his amethyst Corn For The World flask, wrapped carefully in sheets of cotton batting, and returned with it to Swiggert.

Had Swiggert, asked Leet, unwrapping the bottle as though it were a star sapphire, ever seen anything like that in his wanderings among the deserted mining camps?

Swiggert examined the flask with some care, helped himself to another drink of Mexican rye whis-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

key, and asked Leet what sort of bottle it was. Leet explained that it was one of the early type of American bottles which had been made in great numbers around the time of the Mexican War and the Civil War, as well as earlier in the century. Through breakage, however, they had become scarcer and scarcer, he said; so that good flasks, especially colored flasks, had become somewhat valuable.

Swiggert essayed the opinion that if they were valuable, he supposed a bottle like Leet's would be worth as much as two or three dollars. Leet, somewhat distressed at having one of his finest flasks undervalued in this way, laughed unpleasantly and said that if Swiggert could buy one for a hundred dollars, he might consider himself lucky.

The flask seemed to hold a strong fascination for Swiggert. He studied it from every side. He wished to know whether a bottle had to have that color in order to be valuable. A blue bottle or a green bottle, for example—would these colors be valuable? he asked.

Leet told him that a blue bottle was nearly as valuable as an amethyst bottle, but that a green bottle or a brown bottle was not one fifth as valuable as the other colors. A golden yellow color, however, was moderately valuable, and an aquamarine, or colorless bottle was worth more than a green or a brown one.

Swiggert then wanted to know about the design on the bottle. Leet's, for example, had a likeness of an ear of corn in the glass, and the words "Corn For The World." For a bottle to be valuable, he wanted to know, did it have to have this design.

It was around this time that Leet awakened to the possibilities in the situation. He knew from long experience that to the average human being a bottle is only a bottle; just as furniture is merely furniture to the person who has never been educated in antiques. The person who knows nothing about antiques can enter a room furnished with the finest Chippendale, Heppelwhite, and Sheraton and see no distinguishing marks about any of the pieces.

In the same way, the person whose attention has never before been directed to bottles is unable to distinguish any design that may be blown in the glass, or the color of the bottle. Frequently he is even blind to its shape, unbelievable as this may seem to the average bottle collector. Consequently, Leet realized that Swiggert had somewhere encountered other whiskey flasks, and that he wished to keep his discovery to himself until he knew all about the bottles.

Leet therefore dissembled busily. He dropped his Corn For The World Flask into his pocket and said indifferently that for a bottle to be valuable it should have an ear of corn blown in its side. There were, he added with a seeming lack of in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

terest, one or two other designs that gave a bottle a certain value, provided its color was right. At the moment, he added, he had forgotten what these other designs were.

Swiggert then confirmed Leet's suspicions by asking whether a bottle was any good if it had a train of cars on one side of it. Leet asked whether the bottle to which he referred was a green bottle or a brown bottle. Swiggert replied that it was a blue bottle.

Leet at once displayed the cruelty and relentlessness that had been developed in him by bottle collecting by replying that if this blue bottle merely had a train of cars on it, it was worth two dollars, but that if it had the words "Success To The Railroads" on it, as well, it was only worth seventy-five cents for one bottle or five dollars for a dozen.

After some meditation Swiggert wished to know whether a large, pot-bellied bottle with a picture of Jenny Lind on it was any good. Leet, who had bought at least forty Jenny Lind bottles at high prices, shook his head regretfully and said that the shape of these bottles prevented them from having any value. For such a bottle, with a picture of the glass works and a single star opposite the likeness of Jenny Lind, he admitted that he was willing to pay fifty cents, provided the color of the bottles was either blue or lavender. For any other color he wouldn't pay anything at all, though as a special favor he would be willing to carry away these bottles without charge, provided blue or lavender Corn For The World bottles could be found for him.

Having thus prepared the ground, he told Swiggert that he could see that somewhere in the surrounding country there existed bottles that Swiggert had seen. Unless these bottles could be viewed by a bottle expert like himself, they could not be valued, either singly or in the mass. Descriptions by mail or word of mouth, or hearsay evidence, where flasks were concerned, were valueless. If, therefore, Swiggert wished to lead him to the bottles, he would be glad to estimate their value and even to purchase the rights to them at a fair price. If Swiggert did not wish to do this, the bottles would be valueless to him as they were at the present moment.

At these words Swiggert drained the dregs from his bottle of Mexican rye and hurled it to the floor with a morose curse. He would, he said, be at the front door of the hotel at six o'clock on the following morning, and would lead Leet to the biggest damned mess of bottles that he had ever seen.

Promptly at six o'clock on the following morning Leet was sitting at the wheel of his roadster in front of the hotel in Douglas; and five minutes later, with Swiggert sitting gloomily beside him, they were speeding over the long straight road toward the Continental Divide.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They twisted through the tortuous mountain roads leading up to Bisbee, past the mountains that man had removed from their beds of copper and hurled into valleys, and through the rugged and barren canyons of the Divide.

Beyond the Divide they turned toward the jagged peaks of the Huachuca Mountains; and in the course of time, high up among the hills, they came to the gray frame cabins and the deserted false-fronted saloons and gambling halls of the forgotten mining camp of Soak Hollow. Gophers, erect on their tails, watched their progress through the dead town with inquisitive noses held high; and angry marmots hurled themselves beneath the decaying cabins with shrill and outraged whistles.

Swiggert gloomily directed Leet to a small cabin at the far end of Soak Hollow's single street—beyond the warped board front of the Grand Opera House, beyond the Freedom Dance Hall, beyond even the Feed Bag Café, The Hot Breath Saloon, and the Full Up Drink Parlour.

The small cabin straddled a depression in the hillside. When Leet, preceded by Swiggert, poked his head between the door posts, from which the door hung crazily askew, he saw that there was barely room within for a single wooden bunk, a chair made from a nail keg, and a few bricks on which a small stove had once rested.

Beneath the bunk was a small square hole. Swiggert pointed solemnly to the hole and observed without emotion that the cabin must have once belonged to the town drunkard.

Leet advanced to the hole and peered into it. The owner of the cabin, apparently, had reclined dreamily in his bunk and finished bottle after bottle of early American liquor; and as he had done so, he had dropped early American bottle after early American bottle into the small square hole immediately beneath his numb and careless hand.

Leet could see an aquamarine Pike's Peak bottle reposing on the top of the heap. Several glints of amethyst caught his eye. Deep in the center of the heap he caught a flash of blue on an unidentified flask.

Swiggert left the cabin and climbed into the depression which the cabin straddled. He reached into the pile of bottles, drew an amber sunburst flask, and held it up to Leet.

"What," asked Swiggert, "is this bottle wuth?"

"That bottle is worthless," replied Leet, who had paid through the nose for an amber sunburst flask only three weeks before.

With a low curse Swiggert flipped the bottle away from him, using an underhand flip which carried it far down the gulch and against a large, protuberant rock, where it disintegrated with a musical tinkle.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Swiggert pawed over the pile of bottles once more and drew out an amethyst eagle and Washington flask with the motto "Remember The Cherry Tree."

"My God!" said Leet, who had heard of the existence of this flask but had considered it a rumor on a par with other old wives' tales.

"How's that?" asked Swiggert avariciously.

"I said 'My God,'" replied Leet, 'because I thought you were going to take me to some really valuable bottles. Instead of that, you show me flasks like that one!"

"Ain't it a valuable one?" asked Swiggert ferociously. "It's the same color as yourn!"

"True," admitted Leet, "but the eagle on it spoils it. If it weren't for the eagle, I would be willing to pay ten dollars for it."

Again emitting a foul oath, Swiggert dashed the flask into the gulch before Leet could stop him; and a shower of amethyst glass splintered from the rock against which it landed. Leet, turning the color of oak ashes, beckoned Swiggert to reenter the cabin.

"Look here, Swiggert," said Leet, when this gloomy guide again stood beside him, "I don't believe I could do much with these bottles, but I'm willing to gamble on them. If you'll give me all the rights to them, and promise to keep your mouth shut about them, I'll give you two hundred dollars for the lot."

"Two hundred dollars ain't enough!" declared Swiggert malevolently. "I've been around in my time, and I know a thing or two. Oh! I seen your face turn pale when I busted that last bottle. Them bottles are wuth a thousand dollars if they're wuth a cent!"

"All right, Swiggert," said Leet desperately. "I'll give you a thousand dollars for them."

"You bet you will," said Swiggert offensively, "and you'll take me East with you while you sell 'em, and you'll give me twenty-five per cent of all the money over a thousand dollars that you make when you sell 'em."

"My heavens, Swiggert, I can't do that!" protested Leet. "If I sold those bottles all at one time, I'd break the bottle market all to pieces. Why, if I sold those all at once, you'll be able to buy amethyst flasks for ten dollars!"

"Oh, is that so!" said Swiggert with a malevolent laugh. "I guess those bottles ain't so wuthless after all. That being the case, I ain't a-going to sell 'em. No, sir! I'm a-going to take 'em East myself and sell 'em!"

At these words, said Leet, he became very cold and calm. "Are those your final words, Swiggert?" he asked deliberately.

"I'll say so!" ejaculated Swiggert coarsely.

In the twinkling of an eye, said Leet, all his long, happy antiqueing expeditions swept across his brain.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Should he, he asked himself, permit all his past pleasures to be set at naught by this ignorant man? Should he permit the pride of bottle collectors all over America to be dashed into the dust through the headstrong act of an unschooled and reckless prospector?

He thought of his eighteen Pitkin flasks. He thought of his amethyst Dr. Dyott and cross-eyed bartender amethyst flask. He thought of Joe Hergesheimer's twenty-four best bottles in America. All the bottle lore of a lifetime flashed through his mind.

Without another word Leet reached into the side pocket of his well-worn tweed jacket, drew out an automatic pistol, and shot Swiggert through the heart. With a deft movement he caught the body as it fell and guided it so that it fell through the hole in the floor and slipped, with a musical tinkle of breaking glass, to the bottom of the pile of bottles.

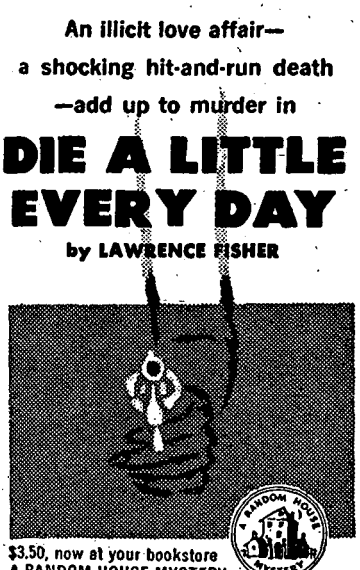
A moment later he was kneeling beside the body. Having assured himself that life was extinct, he hastily selected a few of the finer flasks from the pile—five amethysts, six blues, two golds, and a jade green. Then, with deft hands, he concealed the body beneath the bottles; and fifteen minutes later he was on his way to California with his newly acquired bottles safely tucked in his automobile, and with a song of thanksgiving deep in his heart.

Leet felt, he said, that he must tell somebody about the whole affair; and so he told me. What, he asked, should he do about it?

I thought of my dark blue Pike's Peak or Bust bottle. I thought of my amethyst A Little More Grape Captain Bragg. I thought of my twelve-dollar jade-green Pitkin flask. I thought of my aquamarine Jenny Lind with star and glass works. How, in view of these, could I give him an unbiased opinion?

Finally, with a deep sigh, I advised him to forget the whole affair; and so far as I know he has done so.

•


An illicit love affair—
a shocking hit-and-run death
—add up to murder in
DIE A LITTLE EVERY DAY
by LAWRENCE FISHER
$3.50, now at your bookstore
A RANDOM HOUSE MYSTERY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Master Manhunter—the Super Sleuth—rides again!

THE ADVENTURE OF THE COUNTERFEIT SOVEREIGN

by ROBERT L. FISH

IT WAS A GREY, WINDY DAY IN MID-April of '62 when I returned from my medical rounds and climbed the stairs to our rooms at 221B Bagel Street to find my friend Mr. Schlock Homes bending excitedly over an impressive array of test-tubes, retorts, and similar chemical apparatus. Knowing his dislike of being disturbed while engaged in his researches, I quietly found myself a seat to one side and watched with interest as his fingers reached for a bit of litmus paper.

"You have arrived at a crucial moment, Watney!" said he, his keen eyes glittering. "If this litmus paper remains blue, all is well. If it turns red—then I am afraid we shall have to depend upon store-bought whisky for our afternoon libations!"

He turned back to his task and a moment later lifted his head in triumph, the still-azure strip dripping onto the carpet. Rinsing his hands he dried them carefully upon his dressing-gown and flung himself into a chair.

"And none too soon!" he added in a pleased tone, "for we are to receive a distinguished guest shortly, and I fear that in my preoccupation with my last case I have allowed our liquor stocks to reduce themselves to a bit of Mrs. Essex's cooking sherry, and nothing more."

"A distinguished guest, Homes?" I asked, mystified.

In lieu of answering he handed me a telegraph-form and watched me closely as I read it. It was a request for a consultation with Homes, and I noted automatically that the hour for the appointment was nearly upon us. The form was signed quite simply: Hans Wolfgang Wilhelm Hermann Adolph von Saxe-Homburg, Grand Duke of Kitzle-Farbstein, King of Belgravia.

There was something faintly familiar in the signature and I looked up to see Homes nodding at me as, in his inexplicable fashion, he answered my unspoken thoughts.

"Yes," he said, smiling. "It is the same. You may recall that I was fortunate enough to be of service to his Majesty before, in the matter of those incriminating letters I was able to recover from Polly Ad—" He paused. "But no names!"

His eye fell upon the mantel clock

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and he sprang to his feet. "I must dress!" he exclaimed. "If you would be so kind as to handle the conventions, I'll be back in a moment!"

He had no more than disappeared when the sound of a four-in-hand drawing up to the kerb could be heard, and a moment later the heavy tread of boots came tramping up the stairs. The door was flung open and I found myself facing a man fully seven feet in height, dressed in regal mink slashed with sable. The rich brocade of his ruffled silk shirt-front was pinned at the throat by a large crest carved from a single opal, while his astrakhan-trimmed boots were banded by small emeralds embedded in the leather. Across the broad chest ran a diagonal swath of purple marten carrying a veritable host of medals. But the most surprising feature of his appearance was the thin strip of black mask that hid the upper portion of his face, although it could scarcely conceal the famous Kitzle-Farbstein nose.

"Your Majesty—" I began, overwhelmed by the royal presence, but before I could continue, he raised a large gloved hand imperiously.

"Please!" he said in a deep rich voice with but the faintest trace of accent. "I come here incognito! To everyone I must be plain Mr. Kitzle for this brief period." He paused, peering at me with difficulty through the narrow slits of his mask. "But you are not Homes!"

His hand flew to the jeweled dagger at his hip, but I was saved the necessity of defending myself by the drawling voice of my friend from the doorway.

"No, Mr. Kitzle," said Homes, advancing further into the room. "This is my old friend Dr. Watney, and whatever you have to say may be said freely in his presence, as he is remarkably inattentive."

The gloved hand fell away from the dagger and I found myself breathing normally once again. Homes waved our guest graciously to a seat and sank into one opposite while I repaired to the test-tubes and began mixing drinks.

"You must forgive me," said his Majesty apologetically. "I have recently had the strangest adventure, and I still find myself a bit unnerved. It is precisely for this reason, Mr. Homes, that I requested an interview, for I should appreciate your advice on the entire matter."

Homes leaned forward politely. "As always, Mr. Kitzle," he replied, "I am at your complete service. Please favor us with the details."

"Well, Mr. Homes," said our visitor, sitting forward and accepting a drink, "as you know, I am addicted to fox-hunting, not—as so many of your countrymen—for the sport, but because I have found that a good fox-fur makes up into an extraordinarily handsome cravat. In any event, as I was riding to the hunt this particular fox disappeared over a low wall of an enclosed es-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tate and I therefore reined my horse and followed on foot. To my amazement the grounds, although quite extensive, were heavily populated with people all dressed in white fencing jackets, and all wandering about quite aimlessly. I might mention that their tailor was extremely careless, for it appeared that the sleeves of all these garments had been sewn shut at the cuffs . . . but I digress.

"I stopped several and asked them if they had seen a small brown fox with beady eyes and a general air of fright, but they all merely shook their heads vaguely and continued their wandering about. Not being accustomed to this cavalier treatment, I was about to remonstrate with one of them when there came the distant toll of a bell, and they all turned their footsteps in the direction of a huge house which I then noticed for the first time.

"Determined not to leave without information of my fox, I followed. At the head of the lawn was a set of steps leading to a portal marked 'The Sanitarium,' but as I approached I found my way barred by a large burly individual who placed his hand roughly on my arm and began to interrogate me thoroughly.

"'You!' he said. 'Why aren't you in your jacket?'

"'Unhand me!' I commanded. 'I am the King of Belgravia!'

"'Of course!' this person agreed, still gripping me tightly. 'Who said no? But how did you get out without your white jacket?'

"Well, Mr. Homes, of course it would be quite gauche to wear a white jacket for fox-hunting, and for a moment I was inclined to so advise this uncouth person, but his crudeness led me to feel unobligated to explain. I therefore removed his hand from my sleeve by striking him unconscious, and as I turned away to seek my fox once again, a small person with spiky white hair, a broken nose, and a curious scar running from ear to ear, and also dressed in the same white jacket with sewn-up sleeves, came up and spoke to me. . . ." He paused, eyeing Homes curiously. "You spoke?"

"No, no!" Homes cried. He was now leaning forward most intently, his eyes gleaming. "Pray continue!"

"In any event, then, this man with the spiky white hair said, 'Pick Windsor; or Napoleon! I am the King of Belgravia!'

"Well, Mr. Homes, naturally I was startled, but before I could clarify the situation, my fox darted out of some bushes where it had been hiding, and streaked down the driveway. I followed at once, but unfortunately the estate on that side borders the Great West Road and I lost the animal—a bit unsportingly, I still think—to a small lad on a bicycle. As I returned to my horse it occurred to me that there was something unusual in my adventure, and I thought at once of seeking your advice."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Homes's eyes shone with excitement. He placed his drink to one side with a shudder and leaned back in his chair, tenting his fingers in concentration. For several moments he maintained silence, but when he finally spoke it was on a subject so far removed from the matter on hand that even I, used as I am to the peregrinations of his brain, was surprised.

"Mr. Kitzle who handles the hiring of your kitchen staff?"

The King of Belgravia lifted his eyebrows at this unexpected query, but did not hesitate to answer. "My Prime Minister, Baron Meiterlunk."

"Ah!" said Homes, nodding in satisfaction. He eyed our royal guest keenly. "And would I be wrong in suggesting that of late you and your Prime Minister have not been seeing eye-to-eye on many questions, and that the Baron at this precise moment is in London?"

The King's jaw fell open, disclosing diamond-studded teeth. "Why, yes!" he exclaimed in utter amazement; "although how you were able to deduce this I cannot imagine, as these are facts known only to myself!"

Homes smiled faintly but refused to explain, remaining instead in a brown study that lasted several more minutes. At long last he rose heavily to his feet.

"I fear the affair is more complicated than it appears on the surface," he said thoughtfully. "However, your Majesty may be assured that I shall come to grips with the problem at once. If your Highness would be so kind as to give Dr. Watney the exact location of this estate. . . ."

"Of course. And thank you very much, Mr. Homes." His Majesty arose and bowed gratefully. "I shall await your reports with great eagerness."

Once our distinguished guest had taken his leave, Homes flung himself back into his chair and reached for his glass with a dubious look at the contents.

"A dirty business I fear, Watney," he said, finally returning his eyes to mine. "The outlines of this plot against his Majesty are fairly easy to perceive, but the exact details remain obscure. And also, the best means of foiling the plot."

"But, Homes!" I cried. "What plot? I heard nothing here to-day that would indicate any plot against his Majesty!"

"You heard, but you did not interpret," Homes replied obliquely. "However, it appears too late to take steps to-day. You have our old fencing jackets? Then if you would be so kind as to bother Mrs. Essex for her sewing basket, we had best prepare for the morrow!"

He turned back to his retort and frowned thoughtfully. "And Watney, if you will, you might hand me a bit of charred-oak while you are up. I have just noticed that it wasn't a piece of litmus paper I used this afternoon, after all; but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rather a thrupenny-ha'penny return slip for passage on the Hammersmith omnibus!"

The following morning Homes had me up at seven, and after a hurried breakfast of curried kippers, led me swiftly down the steps to a trap he had engaged earlier. The chill of the morning was acute, and since the fog that was so normal over Whitehall had not yet burned away, our quilted fencing jackets proved a welcome protection against the sharpness of the morning.

Homes gave our destination to the driver, and then leaned back frowning.

The questions that had boiled within me since the previous evening now erupted, but they fell upon deaf ears. "A dastardly affair, Watney," was my companion's only comment, after which he lapsed into a silence which did not invite interruption. I therefore leaned back and reviewed in detail our conversation of the previous day, but I could find nothing there to justify the profound look of introspection that Homes was wearing.

We drew up behind the estate at approximately the same place his Majesty had tethered his mount. Requesting the driver to wait, Homes led the way over the low stone wall and into the cover of a clump of bushes that margined the area. At that hour there were but few jacketed figures in sight, but our luck was in, for one of them was a short man with spiky white hair, a broken nose, and a scar that traversed his face.

This short man was idling his time away by pointing his sewn coat sleeve in various directions and saying 'Bang!' At the sight of this strange figure Homes was seized by uncontrollable excitement and drew me deeper into the obscurity of the bushes.

"Watney!" he whispered in agitation. "I feared there was something familiar in the description his Majesty gave yesterday of his impersonator! That 'Bang!' has revived my memory! This man is none other than Colonel Moron, the finest shot in all Europe, and the second most dangerous man in London!"

"But, Homes," I objected, "did you not tell me that Colonel Moron . . .?"

"Exactly! I had thought him safely incarcerated, but it appears that he is free once again! This development must be given considerable thought."

He leaned against a bush in fierce concentration, his strong thin fingers biting hard on my arm, and once again I was thankful for the protection of the fencing jacket. When at last he straightened up there was a light in his eye that boded ill for some evil-doer.

"Of course!" he said, almost to himself. "Colonel Moron must wait. At the moment it is more important that we see the inside of the house."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We waited until the small man had wandered beyond earshot, and then emerged from the bushes and walked quickly across the grass towards the large house that dominated the estate. There seemed to be no one in attendance at the entrance, and without a word Homes swung open the door and stepped within.

I followed closely and we found ourselves in a deserted passageway, from one end of which came the clatter of pots and pans. Motioning me to maintain silence, Homes led the way down the passage and we peered in at the doorway.

It was a huge kitchen with eight or nine cooks busily preparing food. Homes chuckled in pleased satisfaction. "I was sure of it, Watney! It is the final proof!"

At that moment a large man wearing a chef's cap firmly set on his head turned and noted our presence for the first time.

"You!" he cried fiercely. "Why are you snooping in this kitchen like some Schlock Homes?"

Both the smile on my friend's face and his lazy drawl indicated to me that he had indeed found the solution to the problem, and no longer felt the need for subterfuge. "Because," he replied coolly, "I *am* Schlock Homes!"

"Sure you are!" returned the other. "And I am Pierre of the Ritz!" But when we put forward our hands to accept this introduction, the large man turned away abruptly and called over his shoulder, "Come, come, now! It's still two hours until lunch!"

"You must forgive him, Watney," Homes explained as we crossed the grounds. "All great chefs are temperamental, and I have heard of this Pierre. However, it is of small importance. I see the entire scheme now, as well as the means of foiling it!"

"But, Homes . . ." I began.

"Explanation must wait, Watney. We must return to Bagel Street as quickly as possible, for I must send a message to my brother Criscroft asking him to intercede with the authorities!"

He hurried me across the wall, and moments later we were clattering over the cobblestones of the Great West Road and heading back to the city.

Once in the cab I could contain myself no longer. "Really, Homes!" I cried in exasperation. "You speak of plots and solutions, but I do not understand any of this! Why all this secrecy? Do you not trust me?"

Homes laughed and laid his arm about my shoulder. When he chose to exert his great charm it was difficult to remain angry with him. "No, no, Watney," he said, chuckling. "The truth is that only at 'The Sanitarium' did I see the plan with all its ramifications, plus the ideal means of thwarting it. Tell me: what is your opinion of the establishment we have just left?"

"Well," I said, mollified by this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

request for my help, "it is obviously the home of a very wealthy man, for the grounds are extensive and well cared for.

"Relatives?" I hazarded.

"But if they were relatives, how do you account for their clothing?"

"Hand-me-downs?" I suggested.

"No, Watney," he replied, serious once again. "There is only one explanation for the uniformity of the white jackets and for the huge kitchen we saw."

"And that is . . .?"

"The place is obviously a restaurant! As you should know, it is the modern custom to name roadhouses in such a manner as to attract customers, and the name, 'The Sanitarium,' which is from the Latin, suggests cleanliness, the prime concern of people eating out. In line with this custom, it is also common to dress the waiters in keeping with the décor—hence the white jackets."

"But the sewn cuffs, Homes!" I cried. "How do you explain those?"

"Quite simple, Watney! A further extension of the sanitary theme. Obviously to keep their fingers out of the soup!"

I leaned back, amazed at the way Homes could bring clarity out of confusion. Once it had been explained, of course, it appeared simple; but I realized the gifts with which my friend was endowed—to be able to cut so cleanly through the fog of misleading facts. Then another thought struck me.

"But, Homes," I said. "You spoke of a plot . . ."

"Precisely, Watney! As soon as his Majesty described the white jackets I thought of a restaurant. The story of someone impersonating him suggested the possibility of a plot. It was for this reason that I enquired if Baron Meiterlunk handled the hiring of servants, and if he were in London. Seeing Colonel Moron confirmed my suspicions; it was apparent that Meiterlunk planned on smuggling an assassin into the palace in the guise of a waiter!"

I nodded at the certainty of Home's theory, but then my face fell. "But how can you stop the plot, Homes?" I asked in discouragement.

Homes leaned forward. "It is apparent that Colonel Moron, in the short time since his escape, cannot have completed his training as a waiter," he said calmly. "Meiterlunk is too much of a realist to attempt to place a person, disguised as a servant, on the palace staff unless he were thoroughly trained in his duties. If we are able to prevent Colonel Moron from completing his training, the plot must fall through!"

"But might not Meiterlunk find another instrument, then, for his scheme? A buxom upstairs maid, for example?"

Homes shook his head decisively. "You underestimate the Baron, my dear Watney! Once he finds himself

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

foiled, he will make it his business to discover who was responsible. And once he knows it was Schlock Homes who put an end to his diabolical scheme, he will realize the utter hopelessness of his position, and never try again. No, you may be sure that the King of Belgravia is safe. Baron Meiterlunk will return to his homeland without his assassin, and be content to be Prime Minister and nothing more!"

Our cab rolled up to our door and I managed to pay the driver despite the sewn sleeves and follow Homes up the stairs. Once within the privacy of our chambers, Homes flung off the restricting jacket and reached for the Iranian *wagon-lit* in which he kept his tobacco.

"And now, Watney," he said, once his pipe was going to his satisfaction, "the wire to Criscroft that shall scotch his nefarious plot once and for all!"

As he dictated to me, my mind reared at the sheer brilliance of his scheme. It was now certain that Colonel Moron would never conclude his training as a waiter—for Homes was arranging to have 'The Sanatarium' deprived of its food-dispensing license!

It was several days before the fruits of Homes's efforts on behalf of the King of Belgravia became apparent. I had come in to a late breakfast of kippered curry to find Homes deep in his newspaper, *The Morning Vesper;* with a smile of triumph he handed it across to me, the article he had been perusing uppermost.

It detailed an account of the return to Belgravia of its Prime Minister, and noted that he returned alone. The King was remaining for a few days to enjoy the pouleshooting at Sandringham.

Having already praised Homes for his coup several times, I felt it best to give his ego a rest, and for that reason pretended interest in another article; but his keen eyes immediately noted my defection.

"You have noted something of interest to us?" he asked, alert at once.

I could not keep up the pretence. "No, Homes," I replied, a bit ashamed of my subterfuge. "Actually, it is nothing but a tragic story of a food riot in some insane asylum."

"Poor souls!" said Homes softly, displaying that humanity that never ceased to surprise me. "I wish I could help!" He looked up, laying aside his pipe.

"Do you know, Watney," he added, his deep eyes serious, "whenever I read of places of that nature I cannot help but think: 'There, but for the grace of God, goes Schlock Homes!'"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **RUFUS KING**

TITLE: ***The Gods, To Avenge . . .***

TYPE: Detective Novelette

DETECTIVE: Stuff Driscoll

LOCALE: Halcyon, Florida

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Two eccentric spinsters—a weird loggia full of flora, fish, and fauna—an absurd will, but legally sound—and a nightly ritual involving a whistling teakettle . . .*

THE MORNING THAT THEY FISHED the foulard-clad body of Miss Rose Akronby from the rockpit was typically Gold Coast Floridian. A fat hot sun was at its travel-folder best. The trade wind was blasé among the palm fronds, and Halcyon—a placid township vegetating between the brassiness of Miami and the muted oboe effects of Fort Lauderdale—lay wrapped in its semitropical torpor.

Lily, the younger by ten years of the two Akronby sisters, had found Rose's body, limp as an elderly doll, down under the rockpit's crystal-clear waters.

The remainder of that otherwise idyllic morning engaged the professional attentions of the local police, the medical examiner, Chief Criminal Investigator Stuff Driscoll of the sheriff's bureau and—rather oddly—a young Dr. Leonard Band who held the appointment of county psychiatrist at a salary of $6000 per year and who was lucratively establishing a private practice among the mixed-up citizens of assorted sexes who inhabited said Gold Coast.

The Akronby sisters were rich. They were reputed to be slightly eccentric in a faddish way—dab-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

blers in Sufiism, Buddhism, that sort of thing—and somewhat of the recluse type. The death of one of them was most welcome news, especially since local vice, bolita, and high echelon graft were in a depressingly siesta mood. The press, radio, and mobile TV all clustered around Lily, the remnant sister, with the authoritative impudence of flies.

Miss Lily Akronby was not averse. Her composure on the brief heels of her horrifying discovery in the rockpit was admirable. She received the ladies and gentlemen of the several news media in her home's jasmine-scented patio.

Her voice as it came over the air and (taped) from the screens of innumerable television sets was definitive and clear. Her words were also quoted verbatim in the press. It was, she announced, her unhappy belief that her dear sister Rose, who had been under psychiatric treatment by Dr. Leonard Band of Fort Lauderdale, had met death by drowning *while under the influence of posthypnotic suggestion.*

The press loved it. The reading and viewing public loved it.

Stuff Driscoll did not love it, and young Dr. Leonard Band received the impact of Lily Akronby's publicized Mickey Finn with shock. If the charge were proved, his professional career could suffer a setback of fatal proportions.

For it was the undeniable truth that Miss Rose Akronby, at present the foularded corpse, had been his patient and he had used hypnosis therapeutically to probe and attempt to cure her avowed dread of water.

He told as much to Chief Criminal Investigator Stuff Driscoll when they met, purposely, for a late lunch at The Lobster Pot. It was one of Halcyon's more atmospheric dining traps and they were occupying a table that was reasonably private. Their waitress had served cold seafood platters and then had ignored them, her mind being currently bemused over the divorce proceedings against an unspeakable Chicago weight lifter with a tic.

Dr. Band isolated a plump chilled shrimp and said to Stuff Driscoll, "Look at it this way—it's fantastically improbable that any posthypnotic suggestion made Rose Akronby douse herself in the rockpit. I gave her none. And yet when you consider the whole picture, there's a—oh, say a thousand-to-one chance that her sister's premise could be true."

"Whatever you say, Len. Always providing, of course, that she drowned."

"What else?"

"Plenty else. She could have been killed and then dumped in the rockpit for concealment. She could have gone there to practice some of those weird 'isms' they say the sisters went in for, had a heart attack

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or a seizure, and fallen in. The autopsy will give us the answer. Ainsworth's getting right on with it. He told me he'd get in touch."

Stuff considered the faint film on his friend's copper-toned (golf, water skiing) skin. Len normally did not sweat. The men's friendship was a solid one. It had matured in the same university, throughout the same service in the Pacific, and presently was bonded by their adjacent homes in Fort Lauderdale, with their respective wives on a coffee-break footing. In fact, Stuff accepted this problem of Len's as his own, not as an impersonal assignment—almost in the nature of a family affair.

"Look at it sensibly," Stuff went on. "Even from the little I was able to gather during that three-ring circus in the patio this morning, Rose Akronby wasn't the type of woman to wander off to the back of the estate and go swimming in a dotted-foulard house dress. Nor would I have considered the general layout her choice for committing suicide."

"Suicide? Rose Akronby? That's out—positively. She would have clung to life at the age of a hundred and ten. Death, to her, was something that you just read about. But take it from me, she had no fear of it."

"Then why was she so afraid of water? If not in connection with dying, why did she dread it?"

Len absent-mindedly salted a fish fillet for the third time. "Why," he said, "do you suppose she was paying me twenty-five dollars an hour if not to find the answer?"

"Well, did you? Find the answer, I mean."

"No. And of course it's impossible now."

"How far did you get?"

"Nowhere that made any sense. I'll play the recordings for you and you can see for yourself." (Dr. Band made a practice of keeping a tape recorder concealed in a brief case and constantly in operation beside his desk during all consultations.) "There's nothing on them of a remotely confidential nature. They might, however, give you an insight into her personality and character."

"I want to hear them. Later—say, this evening?"

"All right. Well, finally I decided to try hypnosis."

"Tell me, Len, *is* there any danger involved in its use?"

Dr. Band, whose tendency was to release his couchside manner when under strain, lapsed into the pontifical. "There is an element of danger in every move a surgeon makes, in every dose of medicine a doctor prescribes. Over a wide area—the simpler jobs, the commonplace diagnoses—the element is negligible to the point of being nonexistent. Now hypnotism, in the hands of a qualified practitioner—and I *am* one—is comparable."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Look, brother, I'm not suggesting—"

"I know you're not, Stuff. I'm edgy, that's all. Who wouldn't be? My receptionist has already received three cancellations of appointments. That Akronby woman with her irresponsible broadcasting could kill my practice!"

Stuff appreciated this. Psychiatry still could be classed as a luxury item. Not like essentials—medical care or surgery. Even today it was fairly restricted to being a commodity for the rich, much as the more expensive caviar and goose liver pastes.

"Len, you suggested that Lily Akronby's press release just possibly could be true. How literally do you mean that?"

"This much. I had Rose Akronby under hypnosis twice. My probing got nowhere. I'd almost reached the point of considering her phobia as plain hogwash. I mean, I felt a nagging suspicion that there was something else, something *different* in back of it. Almost as though she were pulling it purposely on me for some—well, some unorthodox reason. You can sense those things, you know."

"Why would she?"

"Heaven knows. I don't. At any rate, I went through the motions. I did give her one posthypnotic suggestion that her dread of water must have been the result of some traumatic childhood experience, that it was unreasonable in a mature woman—mature! she would have been sixty next month—and I did leave the suggestion that she should attempt to pinpoint the childhood experience." Len shoved his plate away with a helpless gesture. "Stuff, tell me what to do."

"Nothing right now. Sit tight."

"You know it isn't just myself. It's Stella. You can understand that." Stella was Len's wife, a freckled young matron with a Barry College background, a naturalist in the area of plants—her serious hobby—and with a power-behind-the-throne touch where her husband's career was concerned. "We're getting our first real breaks financially and Stella likes them. I like them. Her first mink—almost need a spyglass to see it, but it's mink. After six years of you know what it's like—installment payments like a rainstorm every month. And now, just when we're beginning to breathe easy, this comes along."

"One thing," Stuff said.

"Yes?"

"They're bound to call on you to testify at the inquest. It's slated for three o'clock the day after tomorrow. Whatever we do must be done before then. Otherwise—and there's no use in not facing it—you'll be in for it. I don't mean anything so ridiculous as a formal charge against you, but the word will get out."

"It's already out, thanks to sister Lily."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Not officially. Only her sayso. Only a surmise. I want to hear those recordings you taped with Rose. I want to find out how the Akronby estate stands now that she's dead. I want—oh, yes, Miss Davis?"

Miss Davis, the room's well-preserved hostess, wafted a zephyr of Blue Grass perfume across the table.

"You are wanted on the telephone, Mr. Driscoll," she said. "A Dr. Ainsworth."

Ainsworth's voice said over the wire: "They told me at headquarters I'd probably catch you there. Dawdling. Guzzling."

"Both, Bill. Got something?"

"Enough to interest you. Give you a line. Nothing complete, of course."

"Did she drown?"

"Well, yes—and no."

"Now that makes my day just perfect."

"Shall I amplify?"

"You'd better."

"You asked for it. Just keep this in mind: a death by drowning is a death by asphyxia—when access of the air is cut off from the air passages. Simple?"

"Simple."

"Question arises: could the victim have first been smothered—same thing, asphyxia—and then tossed into the water."

"Look here, Bill, you know as well as I do there are definite signs—foam, frothy liquid in the air passages—why should I list them for you?"

"Pay attention, my naive child. Post-mortem appearances in a submerged body are variable and *none* of them is pathognomonic—decisively characteristic. In the case of the late Miss Akronby there was no frothy liquid, as you describe it, in the air passages. That, friend, is not unique."

"But?"

"Exactly. We come to the crux: the still arguable question as to whether or not water enters the lungs or stomach of a body which is submerged after death. Sydney Smith, one of our sterling authorities, holds the opinion that it does *not*. But Kasparek and other equally eminent authorities consider it a distinct possibility that water may seep through the air passages of a person submerged after death, carrying in microscopic water plants and other similar trivia. And as Gonzales so aptly puts it, this question at present cannot be answered satisfactorily, and the medical examiner—me, brother—can only correlate his observations with the other findings in the case. Said other findings being strictly in your department."

"Now look here, Bill—"

"Hold it. I told you it was yes-and-no. The lack of your frothy liquid is, admittedly, on the no-drowning side—it and a few other odds and ends."

"What other odds and ends?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No fingernail marks in the palms of the hands for one. Usually are—spasmodic clenching. But on the yes-drowning side you've got this: there are traces of what appears to be *myriophyllum verticillatum* and perhaps some *anacharis canadensis* in the bronchial tubes and air passages from the nasal cavities."

"Oh, knock it off, Bill!"

Ainsworth laughed. "They're traces of water plants, Stuff—Water Milfoil and Ditchmoss. And we're back at our crux: were they breathed and gulped in before the lady succumbed to rapid asphyxia while alive, which would make it a drowning, or did they seep in after her dead body was tossed into the rockpit which, to date, makes it a death by asphyxia—smothering, pillow over her face, anything you like. And that, friend, is why I say it's yes—and then again, no."

"Well at least there are the traces of Water Milfoil and Ditchmoss."

"As I said."

"Are you going to quit now, or go further? Poison? Narcotics?"

"I'll give it the works."

Lily Akronby decided on a violet crepe with a fichu of pale muslin for the afternoon. The skirt was long. Lily's skirts were always long in deference to her legs which were on the spindle order and vague in the way of ankles. She did not expect many callers but there might be some, with their lip services of sympathy.

A final look in her dressing-table mirror reflected the same haphazard arrangement of gray hair and features—completely undistinguished except for her eyes which were slightly of the Boston bulldog type and suggested glass.

The hour, she noticed, was half-past two. As the daily schedule (adamantly established and inculcated in Lily by Rose) called for the fish to be fed at three o'clock, Lily decided to do her receiving of any possible callers in the loggia.

She went to it and rang for Fritz. Fritz was the husband-half of the Swiss couple who ran the house.

She said when he came, "I'll see anyone who calls here in the loggia."

"Yes, madam."

"Better tell Anna to have tea things ready. Cakes, perhaps small sandwiches—"

"Anna will know."

"Thank you, Fritz."

"Yes, madam.'

Lily sank with relief on a chaise longue of bamboo. She was indescribably tired. Physically, mentally, emotionally—well, pooped. Her glasslike eyes absorbed without seeing the familiar scene of the cluttered loggia, and she thought, cautiously: I can chuck the things all out now if I want to. As soon as it's seemly. How soon after was seemly? A vision of the loggia in a refreshing state of simple clarity bemused her, and in her mind's eye visioned white matchstick curtains

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sun-flooded by day and pale in lamplight at evening.

It was comforting to feel that now she could do things of her own volition, make decisions of her own, and perhaps, in time, shake herself loose from the shackles of age-ingrained habits and regimentation. Also, there would be money to spend in warm, delightful fashions, with no more of the galling helpless feeling of watching Rose dissipate their incomes with an iron inflexibility down countless drains of cults and oddly dressed turbaned fanatics. Mr. Maybank, their family lawyer, would let her know exactly how much there was to be dabbled in when he kept his appointment with her for this evening.

Lily's agreeable stream of speculation was broken by Fritz's voice from the living-room doorway.

"A Mr. Driscoll, madam."

Driscoll—oh, yes, that personable young man from the sheriff's bureau. But he had already questioned her in the patio during the feverish morning crush—vague generalizations which she abstractedly answered while her mind had been fixed on the bolt she intended to hurl at Dr. Band.

"Mr. Driscoll?" Lily extended limp, ringless fingers.

Stuff's panoramic glance around the loggia reinforced his impression that the Akronby sisters were truly on the offbeat side. The south and west walls were unbroken banks of jalousies. The southern one offered a bewildering clutter of Florida's more exotic flora, with a small workbench that held, he noted, an assortment of gardening aids such as a hand spray activated by a large red-rubber bulb, insecticide sprays, and a generous assortment of pest controls, both powder and liquid—any one of which if taken internally would cause an absent-minded gardener to drop dead.

The west wall seemed devoted to fauna in, happily, a restrained mood. A swift tabulation listed an aquarium in which assorted goldfish lazed about among the tank's oxygenating greeneries, banked cages of parakeets of varying pastel shades and centered, a filagree cage that housed a 19-inch pink-and-yellow banded black horror that resembled a stretched-out Indian beaded bag and was, unquestionably, a foul tempered gila monster—the only poisonous lizard indigenous to the United States.

"A hobby, Mr. Driscoll," Lily said, noting his survey. "Rose called this our Nature Room. May I ring for tea? Or perhaps something more robust?"

"Thank you, no, Miss Akronby. It's a little early."

Lily looked at her watch and stood up. "I'm glad you reminded me of the time. It's exactly three. The fish."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I hope you won't mind my attending to it while we talk, but it's the hour for feeding the fish. Sched-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ule is everything, Rose always said, and the house, our lives, are practically run on a timetable."

Stuff's smile was agreeable. "No variations?"

"Dear man, no!" Lily selected a workbench and began feeding operations at the aquarium. "Rose was a perfect martinet on the subject. From eight-thirty breakfast straight up to ten o'clock at night."

"What happened at ten? Bedtime?"

"No, not yet. Tisane."

"Tisane?"

It's like tea, but made from an infusion of cherry stems and camomile. One of those *nothing* sort of things, but supposed to be disgustingly healthy. Anyhow, at five minutes to ten every night Rose would leave the living room, and go into the kitchen, and put the kettle on—the copper kind with a piercing whistle. And invariably at exactly ten o'clock it would."

"Whistle?"

"Yes. My nerves would be on edge, like waiting for the second shoe to drop. We could hear the whistle quite plainly from the living room."

"Your sister would do this herself?"

"The servants sleep at their own home and leave shortly after dinner. In any case, tisane was a strict ritual with Rose. She inherited the habit from Papa." A curious expression, vague as a drift of fog, touched Lily's face. "Rose inherited lots of things from Papa. And just what did you want to see me about, Mr. Driscoll? I rather thought we had covered everything this morning?"

"I think you'll agree that things were pretty confused this morning, Miss Akronby—thanks largely to the press. What I'd like to ask you is why, exactly, you went out to the rockpit to look for your sister? What made you think she might be there?"

Lily replaced the container of fish food on the workbench. When she faced Stuff her expression had set in a cool, detached mold. She said blandly, "Why, Dr. Band, of course."

The attack was frontal enough, and Stuff could appreciate its impact on reporters if it were repeated at the inquest. He said with careful politeness, "Wasn't that rather jumping to a conclusion—before the cause of your sister's death had been officially determined?"

A flick, the faintest flash of—fear? bewilderment? conjecture? Stuff could not place it; but the flick momentarily humanized the glassiness of Lily's eyes. Then it was instantly gone.

"I don't understand you, Mr. Driscoll. And quite surely you have failed to understand me."

"Perhaps if you were to be more definite?"

"Isn't it sufficient that a part of Dr. Band's treatment, as Rose told me, was a suggestion that she sit beside some appreciable body of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

water for a quarter of an hour every day?"

"Did he specify the rockpit?"

"Oh, no—no place was specified, but the rockpit was the most convenient. It is only a minute's walk from the house. And naturally, when Rose failed to appear for breakfast—that was when I felt a shock of alarm—"

"Alarm? Simply because your sister was late for breakfast?"

"Definitely alarm. Such a thing was unheard of. Our schedule called for our being seated for breakfast at half-past eight—to the minute. It may seem absurd to you, Mr. Driscoll. Childish, even. I am not unaware that many people in the community consider us—well, eccentric—and it's perfectly understandable that you should, too. But you didn't know Rose." Lily receded further into the past and added, "And you didn't know Papa."

"You went to her room first?"

"Naturally."

"When did the thought of the rockpit occur to you?"

"Almost immediately, Mr. Driscoll. It seemed a psychic certainty. You see, Rose and I both held open minds on the phenomenon of extrasensory perception. I consider it stupid in this age of fabulous experimentation not to do so. Don't you?"

"Many brilliant men agree with you, Miss Akronby. The work now being done at Duke is an obvious example."

"But you yourself do not believe?"

Stuff's smile was brief. "Let's say that my mind, too, is at least partially open. There is one other thing—your accusation concerning posthypnotic suggestion having caused your sister to drown in the rockpit. She could not possibly have told you anything like that. She would not *consciously* have been aware of it herself."

Lily's tone did not change. It remained satin-smooth. "Of course Rose didn't tell me. As you say, Mr. Driscoll, any suggestion made under hypnosis that she enter the water—and thus, I suppose, overcome her dread—would be unknown to her conscious self. It is your terminology that is wrong. I did not accuse Dr. Band. I said I *believed*. It is still my belief and nothing shall prevent my expressing it as publicly as I please. As you undoubtedly know, a belief, in the sense of its being one's opinion, does not legally constitute slander nor, if quoted in the press, libel."

The voice of Fritz interrupted. "Mrs. Fitzhaven and Mrs. Albermarle, madam."

There was no point in Stuff continuing to shuffle any longer among Lily's dogmatic blandnesses. Pieced together, the information gathered at the morning's hectic session in the patio and the one just concluded amounted to little. Lily Akronby had left her sister at her sister's bedroom door soon after ten last

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

night. In the morning, shortly after half-past eight, Lily had found Rose's body in the rockpit's waters.

That was the alpha and omega of Lily's story. Unshakable, Stuff felt —as ironclad as the regimented timetable that had ruled the Akronby sisters' lives.

Stuff politely took his leave. He passed a portly woman who held in a mesh-gloved hand, for no discernible reason, a small pot of African violets. A second woman, a symphony in costume jewelry and metallic grays, held nothing.

Something was wrong about the whole tragic affair. Len Band had felt it too—something unorthodox, vaguely unpleasant—diseased? A photographic impression of the loggia lingered: the banked lush clutter of tropic blooms; the workbench; the red-rubber bulb of the hand spray and the containers of powdered and liquid poisons; the languid beauty of the goldfish in their forestry of greens and, in lethal contrast, the banded lizard whose venom could spell death.

Yes, Stuff felt it strongly: something was wrong.

Mr. Horace Maybank had been the Akronby family lawyer since far back in the days when? Strictly an estate attorney, Maybank, now in his seventies, was completely competent in that area of his profession. He received Stuff Driscoll in his office on Halcyon Boulevard with the mannered courtesy of the gallant unreconstructed South.

"May I suggest a touch of bourbon, Mr. Driscoll? No? No, I daresay not. My own sense of timing is more negligible, so if you will forgive me? Having just returned from Rimini over an unusually active Atlantic Ocean I find myself slightly exhausted."

Maybank generously tilted a crystal decanter and added a dollop of water. From the delicate sunset tinge of Maybank's eyes Stuff decided that the voyage had in no sense been a dry one.

"Perhaps you would prefer that I return later—"

"No, no, dear boy. Perfectly convenient now, I assure you. It's about the Akronby matter, of course? Silly business. Tragic, but basically silly, sir. I have arranged an appointment with Miss Lily for this evening."

"Why is it silly, Mr. Maybanks?"

"The whole Akronby clan inspired the term. You didn't know them. I did. Take Jasper—he was the girl's father—what was known as a character. The man was a fanatic on health. Why, he had the house stuffed with more medical books than you'd find in a g.p.'s library. Not mad, mind you—definitely not in any legal sense—but what you would call 'touched.' I came right out and told him so, sir, when he had me draw up that ridiculous will."

Maybank finished the slug and poured himself a refill.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Stuff felt it was the right moment to prod.

"That is principally what I came to see you about—the estate. Rose Akronby's disposition of her part of it."

"Miss Rose never made a will to my knowledge. No need to. Apart from her personal possessions she had little to dispose of. It would have been a purely sentimental gesture—a brooch here, a bracelet there, trifling mementoes."

"I thought she was a rich woman."

"In a sense you could have called her one. Her yearly income, and Miss Lily's, were large enough. But the body of the Akronby estate was left in a trust fund with myself as executor. Jasper's absurd will took care of all that."

"Will you tell me about it?"

"Why not? It's a matter of public record. Save you time, however. Musty business, delving in documents. I've often wished I was a plumber. I like fixing things with my hands rather than with my brains."

"Understandable, sir."

"Yes. Well, I've told you Jasper was a health faddist—had me drink one of his concoctions once. Some swill called tisane. Every poor wretch who happened to be in the house had to down a cup of it right on the dot of ten each night. That may illustrate what I mean about his being 'touched.'"

"Yes, sir."

"About the will. No need to go in for jargon. The fool thing covered at least six pages. You'll just want the gist."

"Please."

"Incidentally—to give you the proper picture—Miss Lily was a child of eleven when Jasper made it, and Miss Rose was ten years older, a young lady of twenty-one."

"Legally an adult."

"Quite so. The fact undoubtedly entered into Jasper's considerations, especially as the girls' mother was dead, and Miss Rose, upon his death, would be nominally the head of the family. Miss Lily being the 'family,' poor child."

"Why poor child, sir?"

"Because, Mr. Driscoll, Miss Rose was a living replica of her father. Inflexible. Opinionated. Chained."

"Chained?"

"By the terms of the trust. It was to remain in effect until Miss Rose reached her sixtieth year—an event, by the way, that would have taken place next month on the seventh had she lived. The trust would then have been dissolved and the entire estate divert into Miss Rose's hands to do with as she saw fit. My own responsibilities concerning it would then have come to an end."

"But as she *is* dead, what's the situation now?"

"The trust remains in force. I continue on as executor. The sole chance is that Miss Lily will now receive what was Miss Rose's annual income in addition to her own."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Fairly large, you said?"

"A matter of opinion. Community status, one's accustomed way of life, one's obligations, all enter into it. Bundled together the joint incomes will amount to around forty thousand a year."

"And if Miss Lily Akronby were to die?"

Maybank's roseate eyes shot Stuff a slightly amused glance. So the fellow was fishing for suspects! "The trust," he said, "upon Miss Lily's death dissolves. The Akronby estate is then turned over to a health foundation of national repute."

"You used the word 'chained' in connection with Miss Rose Akronby, sir. The expression puzzles me."

"Ah, yes, the terms of the trust—oddities, certainly, but quite legally permissible. After all, fortunes have been left to cats and dogs and birds and the wills received in probate, upheld by the courts, and contestants denied."

"And these oddities, sir?"

"They were based upon Jasper's fetish on health. Ironically, he died shortly after executing the will—fishbone stuck in his throat. He might have come to his senses later and altered it, but the point is Miss Lily was then, as I've said, a child of eleven and Miss Rose a grown woman. Well, here's the oddity—Miss Rose was to be in full control not only of her own income but of Miss Lily's as well. Under certain conditions."

"Which were, sir?"

"That as a result of her supervision and—I quote—care and regulation, her young sister maintained a state of good health."

"But that's absurd!"

"Quite so. But legally sound."

"Do you mean to say that if she caught a cold—"

"Ah, there. I told you the document ran to six pages. Minor ailments—colds and so forth—were excepted; but any serious illness that endangered Miss Lily's life or her mental health—if Miss Lily were to die because of the one or be institutionalized because of the other—then the ax would fall."

"And this ax?"

"The estate would at once divert to the health foundation and Miss Rose would be provided with nothing but a small annuity for the balance of her days. One far too small to allow her to continue her accustomed manner of living."

"Sort of ghastly situation not only for Miss Lily Akronby but for both of them, wouldn't you say?"

"I would, and I said as much to Jasper. In vain."

Stuff carried with him from the interview two thoughts, either of which if proved as motivation could take the pressure off Len Band. *If* the case were not a simple drowning. *If* the case were murder.

Thought One: if Rose Akronby had lived until her sixtieth birthday on the seventh of next month, the trust would then have been

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dissolved. Maybank would then have been out whatever compensation he received for acting as executor—undoubtedly, a healthy sum. An accounting by state and federal auditors would have been in order and if Maybank had indulged in any personal dipping or juggling of the trust's funds, the facts would come to light. . . . A frail eventuality, Stuff thought,—almost too much of a cliché. He placed it on the unlikely list, but kept it on the possible.

Thought Two: if Rose Akronby had lived until her sixtieth birthday she would have controlled the estate, the entire works.

She would have controlled Lily.

Lily . . .

Usually the return home was, for Stuff, the quiet, the happy moment of his day. This evening, no. He parked before the attractive ranch-type house, which was set on the southern bank of one of Fort Lauderdale's picturesque canals, and his wife Vi, in cool cotton print, greeted him in the living room. She sensed the effect of strain.

"A drink or a shower—which first?" she asked.

"Shower, Vi."

"Have you eaten?"

"Drive-in. The usual hamburger."

"Len and Stella are in the garden. They need cheering up. Any hope?"

"Damn little."

"Well, even that."

Stuff showered, put on shorts, a sports shirt, sandals. He went out into the rear garden. It was largely a stretch of costly lawn to the canal's brink and bedded along its sides with flowers and shrubs in fragrant bloom—the job arranged by Vi with Stella's advice, from Stella's hobby-knowledge of botany.

Len met him with a frosted Planter's Punch. No preliminary chit-chat occurred to any of them. Stuff outlined his interview with Lily Akronby. He described in detail the bizarre arrangement of the loggia with its flora, fish, and fauna. He gave a concise account of his talk with Maybank and the oddities of the Akronby trust.

"The bearing for us to keep in mind," he pointed out, "is a date. The seventh of next month—when Rose Akronby would have reached her sixtieth year."

"It gives us two possibles," Len said. "Maybank and the sister. From a psychological viewpoint I'd go for Lily as a Suspect Number One."

"Suppressed? Dominated? A gradual build-up through the years of intolerable frustration?"

"Certainly possible. Then the breaking point—the sixtieth birthday next month when Rose would be completely in the saddle. Never, never any release." Len stiffened his drink. "If only we could prove it was murder. Anything more from Ainsworth?"

"He's finished. The autopsy's done."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well?"

"No poison, no narcotics, no contusions, no diseases that could have been contributory causes. The lady was sound as a drum."

"So she drowned."

"Even that isn't certain, Len. Ainsworth simply refused to commit himself. There are too many contradictions. He is strongly inclined—this is his unofficial opinion—to vote for drowning because of the traces of Water Milfoil and Ditchmoss in the bronchial tubes and air passages—"

Stella Band's somewhat startled voice interrupted from the twilight shadows. "Traces of what?"

"They're water plants, Stella."

"I know they are. Stuff, you *did* say Water Milfoil and Ditchmoss?"

"And Dr. Ainsworth found they had been inhaled? Gulped in while she was submerged in the rockpit?"

"Either that, or else they had seeped in after the body had been submerged, when the woman already was dead from asphyxia."

"But that's almost impossible!"

"Why so?"

Stella explained. . . .

The evening grew still when Stella stopped talking. It was a moment of quiet, broken only by some bedding complaints of a mockingbird in the fernlike foliage of a poinciana tree.

Stuff digested what Stella had said. His thoughts dwelt briefly on his photographic image of the Akronby loggia and on the reputed quirks of the two sisters in the field of "isms."

"Len," he said, "I want to hear the recordings you taped of your sessions with Rose Akronby."

Len shook himself loose from his own concentration. "And I," he said, "want to listen to them again, too. I've got a crazy sort of inkling—I mean, I think I'm beginning to understand why I sensed that Rose Akronby's phobia against water was hogwash—her unorthodox approach—"

"Okay, Len, let's go."

Lily slept, that night, with all the refreshing tranquility of a child. She did not dream. She woke in the morning, from a lifetime's habit, on the dot of seven and in complete awareness of the present and the immediate past.

While dressing, she reviewed with satisfaction the session held the previous evening with Horace Maybank. Two moments of it stood out prominently in her memory. The first, Mr. Maybank's pleasing assurance that she would be, *was* in complete control of her own income, and that Rose's would be added to it as well. A thoroughly soul-warming bundle of about $40,000 every year.

The second memorable moment had occurred before he left. He had called rather late and the hour was then approaching ten. Subconsciously, Lily's eyes had been drawn to the mantle clock in the living room,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and without realizing it, while Mr. Maybank's voice had droned pleasantly on, she had been gripped by tension from 9:55—waiting for the thin, piercing note of the whistling teakettle in the kitchen in its nightly signal for tisane.

The clock had struck ten times—and no whistle had come from the teakettle. Oh, wonder of wonders! Then Mr. Maybank had said, "Are you feeling all right, Miss Lily?"

She had, she remembered, given a little laugh of unutterable relief. She had said, "Tisane," and Mr. Maybank had understood and had laughed a little, too, and had said, "Well, that's over, isn't it?"

Lily finished dressing, having chosen a dark puce faille in deference to the situation—service and internment were scheduled for late tomorrow afternoon when the inquest would be over.

Inquest.

No ripple of tension brushed Lily as the words impinged on her mind. It was simply the last hurdle to be leaped in the horrendous race she had been running during the past several weeks. No obstacle, really. Only one final jump into the rich fulfillment of her lifelong desires.

What earthly reason was there to be even mildly concerned?

None.

Papa's last will and testament was the true murderer. Not Lily.

Papa's encyclopedic library of medical and medico-legal books had been the true weapon of the crime, had given Lily the brilliant, the unusual, the completely original method for its perpetration—and, blessedly, the assurance that she was *safe*. For, thanks to the knowledge gained from the books, Lily considered herself quite as competent as any medical examiner in appreciating the almost insurmountable difficulties of proving a homicidal drowning without an eyewitness to the event.

Not a shred, she felt certain, of circumstantial evidence existed. Not one iota of legal proof.

Nothing—as long as she herself did not commit the impossibly absurd folly of confessing her fearful act to any living soul. Just stick to the one simple statement: she had said good night to Rose at Rose's bedroom door, and next morning she had found Rose in the rockpit, drowned, in her opinion, as the result of a posthypnotic suggestion instilled by Dr. Leonard Band.

Stimulated by these reflections, Lily downed the usual diet-balanced breakfast prescribed by Rose—and all *that* would be changed as soon as the inquest and funeral were wrapped up and done with.

Her day progressed, and several of its incidents were later to prove of importance.

At half-past nine a telephone call came through from that courteous and rather ruggedly good-looking young Mr. Driscoll. Would it inconvenience Miss Akronby, would she be so kind as to drive over at,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

say, around eleven, and dictate and sign a formal statement? A mere formality, of course.

Lily would, and Lily did. Driven by Fritz in the Lancia cabriolet that Rose had selected a good many years ago, Lily spent a full hour and a half not only on the simple, painless business of her statement but, further, in a long and pleasant, if seemingly pointless, chat with Mr. Driscoll. He had appeared quite flatteringly desirous of prolonging the interview.

Fritz drove her home about half-past twelve and Anna, oddly, was out and no preparations were under way for lunch. The house, Fritz informed Lily, was quite empty, but a brief and somewhat confusing note had been scribbled by his wife and left on the kitchen table.

It was shortly deciphered from the wordage of Anna's Swiss-Americanese that a Mr. Peastrom had called soon after Fritz had driven Miss Lily away in the purple Lancia. Mr. Peastrom was "from the immigrations of the United States of America" and wanted to see Fritz's and Anna's naturalization papers if any. As the papers were treasured in a tin box in their home on S.W. 15th Street, the man had insisted on Anna accompanying him there to take a look at them. Which was why Anna had been compelled to leave the lunch undone and the house with nobody in it. Please excuse.

Briefly, the incident gave Lily pause. Why? What was the possible connection? A reasonable explanation, however, reassured her. The forces of the law were clutching at straws. An inside-out investigation of everyone in the house. But Fritz and Anna were the only others. And, Lily thought placidly, what slender, valueless straws they were.

Anna's return further solidified Lily's conviction. The U.S.A. Mr. Peastrom had not alone examined the naturalization papers minutely but, Anna said, had kept her at the S.W. 15th Street house for an hour and a half longer while subjecting her to a rigorous questioning as to even the smallest details of the Akronby menage during the two years that she and Fritz had been in service.

Lily, satisfied, erased the incident from her mind. There was nothing that Anna could have divulged that could upset the perfect balance, the clever method that Lily had devised, thanks to Papa's fetish and criminally cruel will, for Rose's damp departure into the Beyond.

The day moved leisurely on and at two o'clock in the afternoon Lily, still trapped in the regimented timetable, started spraying the foliage of the loggia's cluttered flora. She used the hand spray with its large red-rubber bulb and, passingly, a modest chill rippled her skin as the notion came that the spray's rubber bulb seemed redder than usual—almost as bright as new.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lily's genuine belief in extrasensory phenomena was on the point of playing tricks with her—the red-red-red of blood sort of thing—when Fritz dispelled the psychic atmosphere of the moment by announcing that one of Miss Rose's Persian gentlemen, a Mr. Abu Nasr al-Yazid, requested to be received.

The man, Lily remembered uncertainly, was one of those who had started Rose off on her Sufiism kick, and with cold formality Lily made short work of him in Papa's library.

Her sister had left no will, therefore nothing had been bequeathed to Mr. Abu Nasr al-Yazid's special "ism." And so, sir, goodbye.

"But *you,* dear lady—dear, may I hope to call you this, dear friend —"

In completely correct Emily Post phraseology, Lily had told him nothing doing. Flat.

Mr. Abu Nasr al-Yazid recognized a stone wall when he faced one. His own polished Emily Post exit left a trailer hanging in the air. "The gods," he had murmured, "may not like what had been your sister's wishes to be circumvented. And your dear sister's spirit, Miss Akronby, may also feel displeased."

Actually, the episode did give Lily a jolt. The living representatives of the law did not disturb her. No conceivable acts of retribution could assail her at their hands. But when it came to the mystical regions of the Unknown—to, perhaps, the enigmatic vengeance of the dead . . .

Fortunately for Lily's peace of mind, a spatter of callers occupied the rest of the afternoon. They were mainly acquaintances of casual standing—simply *name* it, dear Lily—they might do to temper the sadness of (they kindly took it for granted) these initial hours of her grief.

The last of them, an aging Miss Twining and an equally ripened Miss Elsa Brandquick, both high ranking officers in the Halcyon Women's Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Club, cleared out at half-past five.

The tropical twilight swiftly completed its paint job in the sky and evening took over with a studding of stars. Lily ate what she decided would be her final health-regime dinner. Definitely, the menus of the future would include such favorite Southern delicacies as Pendennis turtle soup, royal poinciana pompano with shrimp stuffing, Miss Cecelia's cream cake.

She told Fritz and Anna, as she had similarly assured them last evening, that there was no reason on earth why they should spend the night with her in the house. She had not the slightest qualm about passing the long dark hours alone.

One minor incident did illumine the couple's departure. Each had a key to the kitchen door and Anna habitually kept hers on a hook by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the spice cabinet, because she was always accompanied by Fritz and he carried his. Well, in the U.S.A. Peastrom confusion and excitement Anna simply could not remember whether she had taken her key and locked the kitchen door when she left with him. Or not. Anyhow, it wasn't in her bag and it wasn't any longer hanging on the hook by the spice cabinet and either she'd left it at home or hadn't—and what did you say, madam?

It was of no consequence, Lily said. Anna's key would eventually turn up. She, Lily, would use her own key to lock the kitchen door for the night.

Fritz and Anna left.

The hour was nine.

Lily was alone.

. . . She locked the kitchen door with one from the ringful that held the house keys in general. She made sure that the controls of the gas range were turned at Off. Her look, for a reflective moment, rested impassively on the copper whistling teakettle where it stood on the utensils shelf. Mute, she decided, now forevermore.

Petit point had recently been the order of the evening and Lily got out her own project—a chair seat of stylized geraniums arranged in a wreath—and sat down to work.

The living room seemed exceptionally hushed—owing, perhaps, to the absence of Rose's breathing. It struck Lily as rather an oddity how you could feel—well, lonely for a person—even though you had bitterly hated that person with all your heart and soul.

The night, the house, the room enfolded her in a sheltering privacy which became absolute as the minutes of the mantelpiece clock tick-ticked.

Tick—tick—tick—

The ticks multiplied and the petals of six carnations became an accomplished petit-point fact. Lily's fingers ceased their automatic motions and the work lay idle on her lap.

Strange that she should miss Rose, after the years and years of longing for the release that Rose's death would bring her. And the parting murmurs of that Persian Sufiist returned to Lily's thoughts: the gods may not like what had been your sister's wish to be circumvented. And your dear sister's spirit, Miss Akronby may also feel displeased.

How clearly the words came back to Lily in the peaceful quiet of this accustomed room! Peaceful quiet? Or a waiting one?

If so, waiting for what?

The minute hand of the mantlepiece clock stood at ten of ten.

Last night it had been all right because Mr. Maybauk had been with her, yet even so Lily had been strongly gripped with the usual tension that preceded tisane.

The countdown, in this absolute solitude, reached five and Lily's nerves—what a fool she was!—were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

beginning to act up. Implacably her eyes fixed on the minute hand in its inexorable march toward the numeral 10.

The copper whistling teakettle was empty. The kettle was cold. It was on the utensils shelf in the kitchen. Lily knew these to be facts as clearly as she knew her own name.

Three.

Two.

One.

Chimes struck, and the tenth note died delicately in the air.

Then the whistle came.

Thin and piercing—real—it stabbed a shock of mortal terror into Lily's heart. She felt chained in her chair, immobilized by a fear more frightening than she had ever conceived the human system could bear.

The wave swept, engulfed, passed, leaving Lily's body drenched with sweat and her mind in convulsive grasping after some common-sense explanation of the impossible.

It was a joke. A macabre jest played by—whom? Rationalization came to Lily slowly, like the deep, wracking gasps after a shutting off of breath. As Rose's breath—rubbish! The house was empty except for herself. The doors were locked. The windows were locked.

Had she herself suffered some flick of amnesia after Anna and Fritz had gone? Some form of self-hypnosis induced by the gleaming copper of the teakettle? Was it she, then, who had subconsciously put the kettle on the stove and lit the gas?

It was a pretty thought, a solacing thought, but one that was instantly swept from her mind when she realized that she had left the kitchen at nine and that the kettle had started whistling a full hour later, at the stroke of ten.

Cold and desparately afraid, with her whole nervous system lacerated by the whistle's sustained high note, Lily forced herself upright, forced herself to walk into the kitchen's blackness where she switched on the ceiling lights.

What she expected to see, only heaven knows. But even in her state of terror she had been prepared to face the shock of something—or, preferably, someone.

Nothing but the copper kettle confronted her, gusting its steamy whistle ceilingward and resting now not on the utensils shelf but on a burning gas ring of the stove. It struck Lily with the power of a physical blow.

Somebody—not she—had set the kettle to boil.

Or else, her fraying nerves insinuated, some *thing*.

Admittedly, the shocked condition of her brain was making Lily receptive to the possibility that Rose, in some extrasensory, mystical fashion, had broken the barrier of the infinite Unknown and had engineered a shocking jest.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Enough fragile sanity remained to propel Lily to the stove where she turned off the gas, and the vicious whistling shrank into silence. This silence came as a blessed relief.

Lily tried the kitchen door. It was still locked. No one, then, had entered. No human being, of living flesh and blood, had entered.

Her look then went in search of places for concealment around the white-wall, highly sanitary kitchen (Papa had seen to that), but found none.

She stood quite still at the kitchen table, with its surface in the pristine state in which it was always left by Anna, except for a memo pad and pencil, and on the pad a scribble of Anna's, listing a few grocery requirements for the morning.

The tortured gasps of Lily's breathing were on the wane, and half-heartedly she was beginning to accept the improbable solution of a temporary amnesia or a self-hypnosis when a voice spoke.

"Lily—"

The voice came from nowhere, from anywhere, in this room of which she herself was the only living occcpant.

It was Rose's voice.

"Lily—"

A weakness came to Lily's knees. She lowered herself carefully onto a chair beside the table, as a devastating chill cooled her veins, her very fingertips, her brain.

She said tentatively, "Rose?"

Silence. More than silence. It was an unearthly void that echoed its soundless lack of life in the disturbed chambers of Lily's head.

She said, "It is you, Rose? *You* put the kettle on?"

Then again she heard Rose's voice, clearly and so well remembered, halting in its spacing of the words as though the effort of coming from illimitable distances impeded the normal flow of speech.

"Lily—my sister Lily—you must —confess—confess—confess—"

Lily's fingers, which were now disembodied objects chiseled out of ice, crept toward the pencil and the memo pad. She tore off the top sheet with Anna's scribble concerning the need for green peas, tomatoes, and a box of Lux.

Lily started to write.

"My dear Mr. Driscoll . . ."

The supernatural, except as it festered in Lily Akronby's mind, in no sense entered the case.

There was a large closet in the hall just outside the kitchen. It had been built to Mr. Jasper Akronby's specifications to store his innumerable health concoctions and tonics, and during the major part of the past hour Stuff Driscoll and Dr. Leonard Band had remained secreted behind its door, leaving it only to arrange the whistling teakettle effect.

They had let themselves into the kitchen shortly after Anna and Fritz had gone home, using Anna's missing key which, in fact, she had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

left on the hook by the spice cabinet when she had gone off with U.S.A. Peastrom before noon.

The house, at that hour of the morning, had been to all purposes untenanted—Lily being in conference with Stuff Driscoll, while Fritz sat waiting patiently outside in the Lancia cabriolet and Anna was at the S.W. 15th Street house with Peastrom.

Conveniently, Anna in her flustered state had left the kitchen door unlocked, thus saving two deputy technicians from the sheriff's bureau the bother of making a tricky entrance. The two deputies were acting under direct orders from Stuff Driscoll, and were supplied with a search warrant that could be produced if the necessity arose.

The activities of the two deputies were technical and fairly simple. They installed a speaker in the space between the back of the kitchen stove and the wall. They ran its wiring inconspicuously to the closet in the hall outside the kitchen door. They hooked up the wiring with a recorder, the tape of which contained the words spoken later that night by Rose's voice and which had been spliced by Len and Stuff from Rose's recordings made in Dr. Band's office during her visits as his patient.

They had taken from the workbench in the loggia the hand spray with the red-rubber bulb and had replaced it with a new one of similar size and commonplace make.

They had taken the key from its hook by the spice cabinet, tried it in the kitchen door, found that it worked, and later turned the key over to Stuff.

Finally, they had taken samples of the water in the rockpit.

The stage had been set. . .

Once having started, the pencil in Lily's hand did not falter.

How, Lily wrote, can you compress a lifetime of almost fifty years into the brevity of a note? You can't, of course. You struck me, Mr. Driscoll, as being unusually perceptive, so isn't it enough to say that the years were spent under the insufferable domination of my sister? Do you find it strange that those years built up in me a reservoir of deadly hate? That there was always in my heart the wicked *hope* that she would die? That I'd be free?

Our family lawyer, Mr. Horace Maybank, can inform you of the terms in my father's outrageous will. You will understand, then, why I had to kill my sister Rose *before the 7th of next month.*

You will understand why, for her own selfish purposes, she was compelled to guard my health, why no word must ever spread abroad should I become badly ill. She would rarely permit a doctor to see me for, say occasional minor ailments, but would go to one and either ascribe the symptoms to herself or to some hypothetical case and then transfer, to me, any suggested treatment.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Because of my father's—yes, mania—on the subject of good health and his exhaustive library of medical and medico-legal works, my sister—and in later years, myself—could almost have been qualified for a medical degree. Papa had induced Rose, easily, to read them and she, later, compelled the task on me.

A task which became almost sardonically convenient when I decided that there was no release from my slavery other than to kill her.

Mr. Maybank can inform you that, by the terms of the Akronby Trust, my sister would have been in her opinion, pauperized were I to be committed to a mental institution.

Well over a month ago I started feigning, when alone with Rose, the symptoms of a mental disturbance, gradually building up a simulated phobia against water. My plan was to have my sister's death officially pronounced a drowning—one that would be the result of the psychiatric conferences which I felt certain she would shortly arrange, with herself as the hypothetical patient. I also took into calculation the excellent chance that the now acceptable therapeutic use of hypnotism would enter into the probing of her (mine, by proxy) phobia against water.

Rose was, of course, as familiar with every detail of my life and childhood as she was of her own, so her responses to psychiatric questions had been no trick at all. Dr. Band will naturally fill you in on all this.

I smothered Rose with a pillow while she slept. There was a minor struggle, yes, but shock and rapid asphyxia made it brief. My sister was a fragile little woman in a muscular sense. Her strength lay solely in the power of her will.

Drowning, as you know, Mr. Driscoll, is simply a form of asphyxia. I used my knowledge of postmortem procedure to introduce fragments of water-plant life into my sister's bronchial tubes. Repellent as the act must seem to you, to me it was as clinical an operation as the impersonal motions of a surgeon.

My instrument was a hand spray which you will find on the workbench in the loggia. I filled its large red bulb with water drawn from the aquarium, first stirring the tank so that flecks of the oxygenating water plants—nibbled off by the goldfish—would saturate the water in the spray's bulb.

The bulb had sufficient pressure to force its contents by way of the nostrils and mouth into Rose's nasal passages and bronchial tubes, thereby depositing the flecks of plant life for the medical examiner to discover. They were to serve as convincing proof of his assured verdict that my sister had drowned.

My sole personal, public contribution was to be the belief that Rose had entered the rockpit under posthypnotic suggestion, given her by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dr. Band. I needed him, naturally, as a motivating cause for Rose's act.

There is not much more, Mr. Driscoll. Getting my sister into her day clothes, the foulard dress, was not difficult; but getting her body into the garden cart and then wheeling it along the pathway to the rockpit . . .

The pencil slipped from Lily's fingers. The extreme effort of will that had sustained her through these moments of coherence suddenly dissolved, and the mental image of her terrible deed grew into one of almost visual reality.

She raised her haggard face toward some vista that lay limitlessly beyond the range of human sight. Her voice was a cry from the wreckage of her soul.

"Rose—oh, Rose—how clumsy you were when I bundled you into the cart. Rose—Rose, dear, are you still *here?*"

"No, Miss Akronby," a man's voice answered her, "your sister is not here."

Lily turned and looked at the two men standing behind her. Odd of them—she dragged the thought from the cloudy depths of her mind—to call at this hour.

"Mr. Driscoll," she said, "and Dr. Band? Good evening, I—won't you both sit down?"

Her head had the odd sensation of feeling as heavy as the weight of her body. It slumped down on the table. Len Band was swiftly beside her.

"Water," he said.

Stuff brought a glass.

Recovery came slowly. Then after a moment of decreasing tension Lily spoke quite rationally, in one of her periods of recurrent sanity.

"Doctor—you know, of course?"

"Yes, Miss Akronby. On replaying the recordings I finally got on to the—the proxy quality of your sister's responses."

"Well, anyhow, it's all written down right here." Lily shoved the memo sheets tentatively across the table toward Stuff. "That voice, Mr. Driscoll—it was so *very* much like Rose's?"

"It was her voice," Stuff said. "Spliced from recordings of your sister's talks with me."

"I see. And just when did you know? *How* did you know?"

"We knew last night, Miss Akronby, because of a mistake that you made. Oddly, it was Dr. Band's wife who spotted it. Mrs. Band happens to be an expert on botany."

"Botany? How on earth does that enter?"

"The traces of water plants found in the bronchial tubes during the autopsy were identified as Water Milfoil and Ditchmoss."

"But of course—what else would one expect in a case of drowning?"

Stuff's voice was almost kindly, as he looked down on Lily's tired and drawn face from which all hope was washed. "According to Mrs. Band, Water Milfoil and Ditchmoss are species that could

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not conceivably have been found in the waters of the rockpit. They are oxygenating types that one uses in aquariums. Furthermore, there were no traces of them in the samples taken from the rockpit water and tested in our lab. There were, however, traces of them found on the inner surface of the red bulb of the hand spray from your loggia's workbench."

Lily said again, "I see."

And then she said a peculiar thing. Stuff carried the memory of it with him for a long time. It was, he knew from his college English Lit., a quotation from one of Lord Dunsany's plays.

It might have been Lily's epitaph.

"The gods, to avenge themselves, grant us our desires."

Coming later this year . . .

a brand-new, never-before published

NERO WOLFE short novel

complete in one issue

REX STOUT's *Blood Will Tell*

Watch for it—a don't miss, double-distilled detective-doozy!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **PAUL W. FAIRMAN**

TITLE: ***The Shaken Heart***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Sometimes a problem looks so big that you don't know where to start. That's how it looked to John Holland, Senior . . . Does it look the same way to you?*

HE WAS ALONE IN THE LIVING room when the call came. The clock had just struck nine fifteen and he'd stopped reading to rest his eyes and enjoy the deep quiet. Then the phone jangled in raspy contrast to the warm clock chime and he'd stifled a yawn as he picked it up and answered.

"Is this the Holland residence?"

"That's right. John Holland speaking."

"You have a son, Mr. Holland? John Junior?"

"Oh, you want Johnny. I don't think he's home yet, though. He went to a—"

"We have him here, Mr. Holland. This is Sergeant Allman—police department. There's been some trouble at Sunset Park tonight and your boy is under arrest. We'd like you to come to the Barton Street Station as soon as possible."

"But there must be some mistake. Sunset Park is miles from here—on the far side of town. Besides, my son has never been in any trouble."

"The Barton Street Station." A certain weariness in Sergeant Allman's voice said he'd heard such protests before, and now, how about it? "When can we expect you, Mr. Holland?"

"Why, half an hour or so, I suppose, but—"

"Thank you. We'll be waiting. Goodbye."

John Holland cradled the phone and got slowly to his feet. He was a quiet, methodical man who absorbed shock instead of reflecting it; he stood up well under impact. So when Greta looked up from her

Copyright 1959 by United Newspapers Magazine Corporation; reprinted by permission of author's agents, Scott Meredith Literary Agency Inc.; originally titled, "Trouble at Sunset Park."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

homework and saw him standing in the doorway, nothing appeared to be amiss. "Hi, Pops."

"Hi, kitten. Did Johnny say what movie he was going to?"

Greta was fourteen—three years younger than her brother—and properly envious of those "mad seniors," yet never admitting anything except sophisticated boredom. "That crew-cut character report to me? He wouldn't be caught dead!"

"I'm going out for a little while. Tell Mother I'll be along if she gets back first." Lucy was playing bridge at the Community Center and it would not occur to him to disturb her—not until it was absolutely necessary. "You finish your homework," he said. "And stay out of the refrigerator."

"Pops—really! How long is one forced to remain a child in this household?"

Not nearly long enough, his shaken heart answered as he got his coat and hat and went out the back door.

His mind was working strangely. It seemed to be split down the middle, allowing him to think in two directions at once, and part of it held stubbornly to his first reaction: the call had been some kind of stupid mistake. It was unthinkable—Johnny dumped suddenly into police trouble. Someone was going to apologize for this intrusion on his evening.

But the other part of his mind clung just as stubbornly to reality. The police didn't make mistakes. They dealt in cold facts, and the situation, however stunning, had to be faced. John Holland, Junior, was in the hands of the law and John Holland, Senior, had somehow put him there through a pattern of parental failure that completely escaped him.

How? How had he failed his son? He grappled with this question as he drove south toward Marlton, the less desirable section that held both Sunset Park and Barton Street; he wrestled with it as he parked behind one of the several police cars and crossed to the station entrance.

And now it had to be faced—the question he'd been avoiding ever since the phone had rung: what kind of trouble? How bad was it? What sort of after-dark nightmare had Johnny got involved in? John Holland, Senior, straightened his shoulders and climbed the worn steps.

The room was big and shabby. An aura of jungle savagery permeated it, hanging like an invisible cloud over the two dozen or so juveniles who had been herded into one corner and who gave all the appearance of being held at bay. They were not, of course. They'd been completely subdued and were now sullenly awaiting whatever processing the law required.

One youth lay on a stretcher—a pale youngster with hurt, bewildered eyes, both his hands clutched tight in those of a mute, frightened

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

woman who knelt on the floor beside him. The lad did not appear to be dangerously hurt, judging from the attitude of the white-coated intern who talked to a uniformed patrolman nearby.

John Holland glanced around the room twice. There were others besides the juveniles—parents, silent, voluble, angry, fearful, crowded around a desk to the rear; patrolmen in uniform; officers with the stamp but not the uniform. Probably fifty people in all, but John Holland couldn't find his son anywhere.

He checked the room a third time and then tapped a uniformed patrolman on the shoulder. "Pardon me. My name is John Holland. I got a call from a Sergeant Allman. He told me my son had been arrested."

"Better talk to him then. He's one of the two men on the desk. Just push through and tell him who you are."

"Thank you." He did as suggested—pushed until he was facing a blond young man with harassed blue eyes and sweat running in little rivulets down his cheeks.

"John Holland?" The blue eyes searched in perplexity for a moment, then cleared. "Oh—sure—say, will you just shove over to that empty corner? I'll meet you there."

John Holland's reaction was one of increased dread. Where was Johnny? It must be bad, he thought. Worse than the others.

He released his grip on the railing and was washed back out of the jam. He and Sergeant Allman reached the empty corner at the same time.

Allman ran a nervous hand through his hair and then tugged at his collar with a quick, jerky motion. "I owe you an apology, Mr. Holland—getting you out at this time of night. You see, I—"

"You mean my son isn't here?"

"No, sir. It was another lad—blunder on my part. These kids clam up when they're first brought in and sometimes we have to take whatever identification we can find. The one I called you about had a bracelet inscribed *John Holland, Jr.* on it, so I went to the telephone book and it was just my luck to catch another John Holland with a junior in the family. Kind of rare, but it happens. Of course, I should have been more careful about location, but I didn't think about that until later—when I remembered what you said about being miles from Sunset Park. I checked again and then called you back but you'd already left. I'm sorry as the devil about this—"

It occurred to John Holland that Sergeant Allman would keep on talking until he heard words of forgiveness, so he said, "That's quite all right, Sergeant. Mistakes can happen. Don't worry about it."

"I appreciate your attitude, sir. Can I have you driven home?"

"No, thanks. I came in my own car."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Then I'll get back to work—and again, I'm sorry."

John Holland watched Sergeant Allman push his way back to the desk, wishing he'd been a little more positive in his acceptance of Allman's explanation and apology, hoping the Sergeant knew things were truly all right.

But were they? He turned toward the door, forgetting Allman to wonder about himself, about his own peculiar emptiness. The threat had been the most frightening he'd ever faced, yet there was no sense of relief—no satisfaction. A vague frustration, rather—the kind a man gets after an unsatisfactory day's work. A sense of tag ends lying loose . . .

And the mood deepened as he drove homeward.

Lucy Holland knew something was wrong the moment she entered the living room. Like many women who live basically for their husbands and growing families, her perception in such matters had long since changed from a deductive process to a taken-for-granted instinct. A business worry perhaps?

She said, "Hello, dear. Is Johnny back from the movies?"

John Holland glanced up absently. "Almost an hour ago. They're both in bed."

"How about a cup of coffee?"

"Coffee? No, I don't think so."

She hung her coat in the closet. This wasn't business; it was something more personal. She sat on the arm of his chair and circled his bald spot with a fingertip. "Want to tell me about it?"

And like most husbands, John Holland was always startled by his wife's subtle talent. "Oh, nothing to bother you with."

This was his usual prelude to revelation, so she waited, retracting the oval, glad he didn't try to cover it with longer hair from one side as some men did. Finally she said, "A generally rough day?"

"I wasn't going to say anything about it, but as a matter of fact, I got a phone call this evening. From the police."

She listened without comment while he told the story—told it well and clearly. When he was through, she said, "Even knowing Johnny as we do—knowing he couldn't—it must still have been awful, driving down there—"

He made an impatient gesture. "It wasn't that. It was leaving—*coming* away. Somehow I felt guilty."

Lucy glimpsed his problem. "An experience like that—"

"Exactly. The experience. We all give pious lip service to juvenile delinquency, but to most people it's just so many headlines—nothing more than abstract unpleasantness. They feel a little impersonal shame and let it go at that. But tonight I saw it first-hand, Lucy. It looked up at me from a stretcher on the floor of a police station. I saw it in two dozen of its living faces."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He wasn't striving for dramatic effect—only trying to get his thoughts across as he got up from his chair and faced her. "What I'm trying to say is that after seeing what I saw, a man's got no right to mumble, 'There but for the grace of God . . .' and just walk away. A man wants to help. He wants to do something."

"I'm sure we all want to help—"

"But how? Where? Where does one begin?"

She knew him so well—his integrity, his deliberate and methodical accountant's mind. She knew this was no casual indignation. He had been deeply shaken. She said, "Beginnings can be small—"

"But to help you need training. There are professionals who give their whole lives to the problem."

"True, but I wonder if a good parent is ever out of his depth where children are concerned?"

"What do you mean?"

Lucy countered with another question. "Tell me, dear—suppose you'd gone there tonight and actually found our Johnny in trouble. What would you have done?"

The query surprised him. "Why, the obvious thing. I'd have talked to him, gotten the facts, tried to understand."

"Then I imagine that's what the *other* John Holland is doing right now. He's been forced into his beginning."

John Holland's eyes lighted as his first wondering was suddenly answered. There at the police station—of course he'd felt empty. It wasn't a place of triumph. His own potential grief and pain hadn't entirely vanished. It had been merely dropped on the shoulders of another—a different John Holland.

"Lucy, I'm going to see that man. I don't know why I didn't think of it before. I'm going to talk to him and his son."

"I think that would be wonderful."

"Perhaps I *can* help. At least, I'd be *doing* something."

She kissed him lightly on the cheek. "You know you can help."

"First thing in the morning," he said briskly. "And I think I will have that cup of coffee now." He added that last without noticing she was already on the way to the kitchen, smiling at him from the doorway.

"Of course, dear," she said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

. . . "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine" is now bigger and better than ever—32 extra pages *in every issue,* at the new price of 50 cents per copy. These *32 added pages every month* will bring you the highest possible quality of mystery fiction—from stories of pure detection (amateur, armchair, and official) and probing studies of crime (psychological, psychiatric, and Robin Hoodish) to tours de force of suspense, surprise, and even the supernatural.

One of the new features of the bigger-and-better EQMM will be the inclusion, in nearly every issue, of a *short novel*—superlative works by the Grand Masters of Mystery, including such celebrated detective writers as

Erle Stanley Gardner
Rex Stout (about **Nero Wolfe**)
Cornell Woolrich
William Irish (including the famous *Rear Window*)
Hugh Pentecost
Patrick Quentin
the **Gordons**
Anthony Boucher
Victor Canning
Kelley Roos
Philip Wylie
Roy Huggins
Neil Paterson (a modern classic)
Rufus King
Ellery Queen

Be sure not to miss a single issue—you will never forgive yourself! These first fifteen short novels, each about 20,000 words—over a quarter million words in short novels—together with three-quarters of a million words in short stories, or more than *one million words* of the best reading this side of paradise!—constitute a library of larceny . . . the crème du crime, the diamonds of detection, each worth a King's (or a Queen's) ransom.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

An important criminous discovery is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's STRANGE STUDIES FROM LIFE (Candlelight Press, 430 E. 86th St., N.Y. 28; $3)— 3 excellent pioneer essays on true murder, published in *The Strand* in 1901 but never before reprinted, leaving one with acute regret that Doyle did not devote a larger part of his career to fact-crime.

★★★★ **A LITTLE LESS THAN KIND, *by Charlotte Armstrong*** (Coward-McCann, $3.95)

Intense and penetrating novel of psychological suspense, made doubly fascinating by its shrewd variations on a classic murder theme.

★★★★ **ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY: 1963 MID-YEAR EDITION** (Davis, $1)

Greater frequency in these big bargain books brings no reduction in quality: 15 short stories and 5 novelets (from EQMM, 1944-1953) are all distinguished, with Stribling and Post in especially superb form.

★★★ **THE BURDEN OF PROOF, *by Jeffrey Ashford*** (Harper & Row, $3.50)

Versatile and always satisfactory, Ashford tells this time of an innocent man on trial for murder and an ironic triumph of truth.

★★★ **LOVE IN AMSTERDAM, *by Nicolas Freeling*** (Harper & Row, $3.95)

Crime passionel à l'hollandaise adroitly investigated by Inspector Van der Falk and warmly written by gifted new novelist.

★★★ **ISLE OF THE SNAKES, *by Robert L. Fish*** (Simon & Schuster, $3.50)

Author of 1962's best first novel, EQMM, regular, Fish follows up admirably with another lively colorful case for Captain Da Silva.

★★★ **THE SHAGGY DOG AND OTHER MURDERS, *by Fredric Brown*** (Dutton, $3.50)

10 entertaining and highly professional short stories from the pulp detective magazines of the 1940's.

To the many lines now reprinting detective stories of high quality (Dolphin, Collier, Ace, Berkley, etc.), add the new Green Door Mysteries published by Pyramid (50¢ each). The first list includes memorable novels by Mabel Seeley, Georges Simenon and the Lockridges, and Nero Wolfe novelets by Rex Stout.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 252nd "first story" to be published in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Olga Marx's "The Miracle on Fifth Avenue" has the feeling of having been written as a "labor of love"; it reveals a fine appreciation of nature (especially of birds and birdwatchers) and a knowing instinct for the relationships between people . . .

The author was born in New York City and "educated sporadically in 14 schools here and abroad, and in four American colleges and universities." In all this flux (as the author expressed it), writing was her only anchorage. Yet she followed the advice given to her by President Thomas of Bryn Mawr: "Marry, have your children, and then go back to your work." Well, Mrs. Marx is now devoting most of her time to writing, and here are the first fruits . . .

THE MIRACLE ON FIFTH AVENUE

by OLGA MARX

OFF FOR HIS EARLY WALK through the garden, Dudley let the door slam with his old, careless gusto, glanced at a window with drawn blinds, and pinched his nose uneasily. If he'd waked Babs she'd be so cross! He no longer wondered if those two had been right when they warned him against marriage: Oliver, affectionate and protective since their college days, and A.S. who'd never liked him, but considered it the duty of a fellow-birder to give him the benefit of his courtroom experience in matrimonial flounderings.

"But four of our Wing-and-Web members *are* married," Dudley had protested.

"They married young," said A.S. "Their wives had time to adjust to the bird obsession. They have children—concerns of their own. It's different with you and Babs." And then he'd quoted that hateful thing about crabbed age and something youth.

"Nobody could call me crabby!" Dudley had exclaimed. "I've always enjoyed every minute I had to myself."

That was while he'd been working at real estate. It was only since he had reached his financial goal—to retire on a modest income—that he smelled loneliness like mold creeping up a wall, and began to brood on that timeless dark where

LICENSED TO NZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

no birds sing. It was then that he had thought of companionship as a solution—of Babs. She'd been such an efficient secretary, and so sweet about coming to Connecticut on Saturdays to help him with his bird correspondence.

Then one April morning, with violets underfoot, matters had come to a head before he was, perhaps, quite ready. Babs's twenty-five years would subtract that many from his own and even things up, he persuaded himself—only to find that his mathematics did not tally with his marriage . . .

In an hour he must return to the clatter and chatter of a young woman who has slept well and is eager to go. But where *did* you go at Eden Cottage if you had no taste for the outdoors?—a fact Babs had concealed with what A.S. would have called "prenuptial pretense." She would not have felt even a twinge of interest in that gray patter around the feeding station—the first juncos!

As Dudley pulled out his notebook to jot down the date, his eye caught a splash of yellow. He sprinted for it, scattering the birds on purpose, for there, half hidden in a clump of calamus was Peter, Babs's cat. Quite still. Dudley went closer. The creature lay on its side. Already the fleas were making their exodus from a body grown cold and inhospitable.

Something the cat had eaten? An infected scratch? Whatever the cause, he was quite dead and without Dudley's connivance. What a wonderful trick Nature had invented to end annoyances! Dudley produced the tuneless sound which took the place of the whistle he'd never mastered, broke off, and uttered a rueful "tch, tch." Babs would have to be told. She'd been pretty edgy of late, and this wouldn't help.

There had been sturdy straws in the wind even on the honeymoon which he had wanted to spend with the storks in the Camargue. Instead, he found himself in Paris where experienced saleswomen assumed a relationship he had never indulged in, and Prunier's served them food that was priceless in every sense of the word.

In a panic at Babs's unexpectedly extravagant tastes, he had suggested a stroll through the Tuileries where, at no cost at all, one could watch charming little boys sail boats, and exquisite little girls jump rope on graveled paths between rose-trees with explosions of bloom on top.

"Aren't they just too sweet!" she had cried, and he had said, "We might try it. Perhaps with the Ghislaine de Féligonde on the south slope."

"Oh, not the roses," she pouted. "You know what I meant!" And she squeezed his arm more demonstratively than he had come to expect.

Children were definitely not on his program. They had measles,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they romped noisily, they went to camp. It would mean giving up everything he'd slaved for. Babs's red-gold head touched his shoulder. He grazed it with his lips, tingled. Once they were home she'd get over her notions. The main thing was to keep her busy.

So after the flurry of return, changing around the furniture, choosing new drapes, and getting Penny, the colored maid, used to another woman in the house, he broached his plan.

"Had something up my sleeve for quite a while now," he announced.

"Yes?" she inquired dutifully.

"You're in it too," he went on lengthening the suspense. "At least by half."

Her remarkable green eyes widened. She ran to him.

"Dudley! Dudley darling!" He staggered under the vigor of her embrace. "I knew you'd come to see it my way!"

"Now wait a minute," he said, half suffocated and cursing his ineptness. "It's a book, and on such an original subject! It will require research, travel . . ."

"Book!" The word spat contempt. "About birds, I suppose. It's not enough to be awakened at five in the morning to see the first thrush of the season, or be dragged away from my TV program to watch a nuthatch hotfoot it down a tree. I can't so much as use the window seat because I might scare off a precious tit or something, and now you want me to type a book for the rest of my days. Nice to have a secretary always on tap, isn't it! What I want is a baby. I want a baby, I tell you! Every one of your lousy birds lays eggs, and you think it's just great. Then why . . . why?" She burst into tears, tore up the stairs, and vanished with a bang.

From that time on life had become a hell of petty squabbles . . .

Slowly he turned toward the house. The frost had thinned. A red leaf scudded from the maple, but the glory had faded from the day.

"Morning, Penny," he said, and looked at her as at the last filling station before the desert.

"Mornin', Mr. Stockton, sir," said Penny, tipping the bacon pan. "When I come by Binny's Pond, Josh Riley asked me to tell you he'd seen some greenwinged teal."

For a moment his heart rose to the wings sweeping south. He forced it back to earth. His hand shook as he opened Babs's door.

She was drawing on a stocking. The other stocking lay hunched on the floor like a huge beige caterpillar.

He sat down beside her and stroked the radiant tousle of her hair.

"Darling, I'm trully sorry, but something's happened to Peter."

"Peter!" She jerked from under his touch. "What? Where is he? Have you called the vet?"

"It'd be no use. I'm afraid he's gone."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You!" she blazed out at him, tears spilling down her cheeks. "It was you! I know it! My poor Peterkins! Now there's nothing more to cuddle!"

"Babs! How could you think that I . . ."

"Even if you didn't actually . . . you hated him, and now you're glad!"

She threw herself on the bed and pressed her face into the pillow.

"Babs! Please!" His hand hovered but he did not dare touch her. "Mustn't ruffle its little feathers so," he murmured tenderly.

"Stop talking to me as if I were a damn bird," came her muffled reply. Suddenly she sat up, her face still wet, her eyes as hard as jade.

"I'll get another cat," she announced. "Two in fact. So there'll be kittens. And they'll keep down the birds too," she added maliciously. "I'm going in to New York this very day—to that place on Lexington Avenue called Fabulous Felines."

He rose, deeply offended, and said, "I'll check on trains," and headed for his study.

There was a good train in the afternoon. Unhappily he sat and gazed at the group photo on his desk. There they were, the Wing-and-Webbers: Mathers and Bowen, tall Jespersen known as the "Great Dane," and John, called A.S. from the grim habit he had of prefacing evidence that would hang a man with the words "Awful sorry." And Oliver, dear Oliver, and, of course, Dudley himself. Four times a year they met at one another's houses to exchange bird experiences. The next get-together was only a month off—at Oliver's. It would be a respite from Babs. No more than that. Unless . . .

Resolutely he buried the unfinished phrase and started on his mail. Bibliographical data for the woman who was working on bald eagles. An emphatic "No" to the boy who thought he'd seen a woodcock on the ground—he couldn't have. All the Wing-and-Webbers, each a recognized authority, had skulked along woodcock feeding-grounds for hours, and not one of them had ever seen a woodcock on the ground.

While his fingers groped for the keys that Babs should have been tapping for him, he was aware that something, in a secret region, was working on his problems as quietly and effectively as his lungs and veins performed their allotted labors without any conscious doing of his own. He shied away from it.

"Remember Freddy we used to take with us on Audubon trips?" he wrote to Oliver, and went on to tell that the boy's parents were worried because he was on a hush-hush mission, perhaps in a dangerous place. All they had was a Foreign Service Mail Room address. "I could reassure them," he continued. "For in a letter to me he mentioned two birds

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

found only in . . . Note my dots of patriotic withholding. Anyway, a harmless spot. Goes to show another facet of the birding game—clues in detective work! Old as the hills, come to think of it. Didn't the Greeks catch the murderer of one of their poets because of something to do with cranes?"

He addressed his letters, fiddled with clips and rubber bands, started jotting notes, then stopped, his hand poised in mid-air. That "something" toiling unseen inside him suddenly twitched his wrist into motion. *Get rid of Babs,* he wrote.

He contemplated the words without surprise—as one reads a long-expected obituary notice, then tore off the sheet, and burned it. The "how" did not worry him. In due time it would slip into his ken as a minnow swims into a quiet pool.

"There's a good train at four," he told Babs, curled in the forbidden window seat. She was devouring the ads in *The New York Times.* A cardinal lighted on the tray with sunflower seeds.

"Green's in style again," she commented and flung down the paper. The bird flashed away. "Perfect with my coloring! Gosh, it'll be grand," she went on. "Shopping" (he shuddered). "Shows!" (at eight dollars a seat!). "Only if I stay overnight, though . . ."

"Why not?" he acceded mildly. "Stay until I come back from Oliver's, if you like. It's been dull for you here I'll phone the Warrington for a reservation."

"You *are* a sweet!" she cried and kissed him on his bald spot. Like a teasing child. Indecisively he pinched his nose and saw the gesture reflected in her expression of distaste. Saw himself: an insignificant man in shapeless tweeds, with a mouth too small over not enough chin. He dropped his hand.

"Dudley," she said uncertainly. "I wouldn't go at all, I wouldn't be so bitchy if . . . This would be such a perfect place to raise kids," she ended with a rush.

Good God! Now it was plural! He shook his head and watched sullen anger blot out the softness in her face.

"Well, then, if you really don't mind, I will stay in town," she said with the polite affability she had used in the real estate office. "See the girls, inch through the noonday crowds and—now don't laugh!—squeeze into the subway during the rush hour. Buy a green outfit and . . ."

After "subway" he heard nothing more. She had presented him with the "how." So simple! Almost banal!

At the railway station she stood beside him, yet already gone, as the shell of the cicada clings to the bark long after the creature has flown. A quick goodbye. As she took the steps, her beige skirt rode up and gave him a glimpse of her admira-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ble legs. He saw her bright hair move along the aisle, then slowly the train pulled out.

The next day was Penny's afternoon off, but he'd given her the entire day to extract the maximum of pleasure from the funeral of an uncle.

It was a crystal morning. Like that first one in Paris, when Babs had run to the window and exulted, "I just knew God wouldn't let it rain!" The memory blurred his purpose. After all, there was such a thing as divorce! And alimony, he reminded himself, thinking of his precious retirement dollars, the dollars which were to take him to the Camargue, to the tropics . . . His mind cleared, hardened, gave him his orders.

He drove by roundabout ways where he was not likely to meet anyone he knew—though, actually, it wouldn't have mattered. The man with tweeds and binoculars was so familiar a sight all over the countryside that he aroused no more attention than a farmer digging up his last potatoes. Before reaching New York he parked his car, went the rest of the way by subway, reached the Hotel Warrington before nine, and hung about unobtrusively. Trained to watch a nest, he had often stood motionless for hours.

At eleven she appeared, dawdled down Madison Avenue, studied a shop window with Italian knits, crossed to Fifth, and entered a Beauty Salon. The fashionable Richard of Vienna, no less, and on my money, thought Dudley bitterly. She lunched with a girl friend at Chez Suzanne while he stood in a doorway eating a chocolate bar.

He almost lost her at Bergdorf Goodman's, but picked her up again, and trailed her cab to the Algonquin, so twilit in the cocktail lounge that he ventured in. She was sipping a drink—alone. Too bad. A man in the picture, young and with a fine stand of hair, like that handsome fellow staring at her, would have made things easier for him. Presently she rose. As he followed, he noticed the outrageously generous tip she had left for the waiter. Inconspicuous in the five o'clock crowds pouring out of buildings, he tracked her to the subway.

The platform was packed, but her hair led him on like a beacon as she forged to the front. He too was thrust forward by the pressure of the crowd. They milled, shifted, and then at a distant rumble gained in bulk and aggressiveness. As pinpoints of light shot out of a dark funnel, they began to jostle and push. The lights expanded, blazed.

At precisely the right moment he wedged in behind her, dropped the book he was holding, lunged to retrieve it. Her very hair shrieked as he drove his fist into the small of her back and shoved her down into the trough which instantly filled with a rushing mass of iron.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There were shouts, screams. A girl fainted. A woman sobbed.

"My God!" said a man in a lumberjacket who tapped his chest and thighs to make sure he was still in one piece.

Police shouldered in.

"All I know is a fella dropped something and he musta . . ."

"She coulda slipped. Somebody's always dropping those slick candy wrappers . . ."

"If you ask me, she done it on purpose. I saw her jump. Dames!"

Dudley quietly left the clamor behind. He climbed the steps, felt the air flowing in from the square of light ahead, and was safely in the street.

He wanted to run but he forced himself to walk—not too fast and not too slowly, like a man enjoying a late New York afternoon. Gilded clouds flew in formation through blue that deepened, darkened. He walked. The first star hung between two buildings. He walked. People on the curb yelled "Taxi." He walked, in one direction, then another.

The crowds thinned. Clangor diminished to a purr. As though from an enormous distance he heard chimes sounding with a faint metallic rasp. He did not count them, but when they stopped his ears remembered. There had been twelve. It was midnight. And still he walked.

At last he stopped exhausted and looked at his watch. Ten to two. His whirling mind slowed to a stop and swung back on a track that led somewhere. He must be home before Penny returned. As he took his bearings he noted twin spires. St. Patrick's! Near the Independent subway.

He went toward the curb and came to a halt. Something plummeted out of the air and alighted a few yards off. It had wings! Another and still another. He could see them quite plainly—they were thrushes. Five, eight, ten—a whole flock! More birds kept coming—brown creepers, cuckoos, and there, wandering dizzily on the stone steps, a snipe.

His heart quickened. It was a miracle, a sign.

A young man in black tie staggered up to him.

"Do you see what I see?" Dudley asked him urgently.

A glazed look, then a scowl. "Had a helluva lot of doubles tonight," the young man muttered. "Must be seeing things. Birds, thousands of birds. Oughta be ashleep in their nests. Say, whaddaya call 'em?" he demanded belligerently.

Dudley pointed out and explained with the zeal of a missionary toward a none too promising convert.

"Shrushes, shnipes, cuckoos."

Why, the chap had a memory! Pity he was so drunk, clutching at a post now, befogged again, while Dudley jotted down notes furiously and threw elucidations to seeming-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ly deaf ears. He thought he knew what had happened. Obviously the birds were confused. From their flying altitude of three thousand feet, the city, an island of light, appeared like a false dawn. They had come down to feed. How he would have liked to write it up for the Society! Reluctantly he dismissed the idea, for then he'd have to mention New York, and it was imperative for him to have been at Eden Cottage the evening of the accident. He glanced at his companion's wobbly head and turned to go.

And then—as a tall mountain emerges from the mists to jut above the lower ranges—the miracle reached a new peak. A dim shape landed heavily in front of him—like a clumsy brown egg with large eyes and a tail! Dudley drew a deep, exultant breath. Just wait till A.S. heard! He'd die of envy.

"Woodcock on the ground!" he proclaimed in solemn tones as he made for the subway.

When he reached home at five, the moon had just risen. His Eden was lapped in radiance and peace—a peace that would last. He slept so soundly that he had to orient himself to his room. Immediately after breakfast he wrote to Oliver: "At two o'clock in the morning, on October twenty-second," he began and gave a detailed account of what he had seen, except that he transposed the incident to his own garden and ascribed the "false dawn" to the brightness of the autumn moon. Before he could reread his letter, the inevitable telephone call came . . .

"It is sad that this remarkable experience of yours had to occur the very night of the accident," Oliver replied rather formally, and then went on in his usual manner, "So you beat us all to it, fella! A.S. will be fit to be tied!" In a P.S. he added, "Just don't you get too cocky about your woodcock." Dudley chuckled.

Though they all certainly knew what a blessed release Babs's death was, his Wing-and-Webbers offered proper condolences and begged him not to let his bereavement prevent him from attending the quarterly reunion the day after Thanksgiving. He had never intended missing it.

On Friday, about five, they were all there except A.S., who was detained by a conference with a client. Sprawled about the fireplace they exchanged summer experiences. Silent and content, Dudley listened to their chatter. A recent widower was, after all, not supposed to be garrulous.

"I haven't told anyone yet," Oliver said to him. "Wait till you hear —" and paused as A.S. bustled into the room and went straight up to Dudley.

"Want to tell you how sorry I am, old man," A.S. said in his precise, cultivated voice. "Awful sorry," he added mechanically.

"And now," Oliver continued

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I've a surprise. Oyez, oyez, as A.S. would put it. Our Dudley has seen a woodcock on the ground!"

Mathers emitted a whistle.

"I'd give my new Bausch and Lomb binoculars," said Jespersen fervently.

"Where? For Pete's sake, where?" demanded Bowen.

"He wrote it all up. Splendidly. I'll read it to you." Oliver drew a folded sheet from his pocket. My letter, thought Dudley. An uneasiness he could find no reason for numbed him and stuck in his throat. Through his own words in Oliver's voice he saw hair that seemed to scream . . .

"Bravo!" boomed Jespersen when Oliver had finished. The others followed suit. Dudley came to in a rush of warmth, expanded under their friendly praise, and noticed that A.S. alone was silent, his gaunt hands hanging between his knees.

"Thrushes *and* cuckoos *and* snipes *and* a woodcock!" A.S. said at last. "That couldn't be a coincidence." He reached into his pocket and produced a newspaper clipping. "Thought you might have missed this," he explained, never taking his eyes off Dudley. "Editors have no sense of what's really important. This was tucked away in the second section of the New York *Spectator*." He paused, then added almost casually, "For October twenty-second."

Slowly he read the account of the birds on Fifth Avenue. The miracle was unimaginatively written, but the facts tallied point by point with those in Dudley's letter to Oliver. A.S. paused, then read the last sentence: "This reporter was none too sober at the time, but an enthusiastic birder, balding and in tweeds, provided me with the identifying names. I herewith give my anonymous informant due and grateful acknowledgment."

A log crackled. The men remained frozen in their chairs.

"You were in New York the evening of the accident, weren't you, Dudley?" A.S. was still casual.

"I was home," whispered Dudley. Then his voice changed. "I was home, I tell you," he shouted. "I didn't see the woodcock in front of St. Patrick's. I saw him at two A.M. right in my own moonlit garden."

A.S. knifed through his protests.

"The reporter did not mention St. Patrick's," he said sharply. "And it happens that I came home from a late party that night and . . ." He sighed dramatically. "At two A.M. there was no moon."

Oliver mumbled, "Nonsense"—but the word sounded ineffectual.

The muscles in Dudley's jaw were working. Out, I want out, he thought wildly. A mad impulse drove him to the front door. The knob felt firm and cool. It turned. The door swung open. Sweet and crisp, the wind touched his burning face. A hand fell on his shoulder. It closed in a bony vise.

"Awful sorry," said A.S.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HERBERT HARRIS**

TITLE: ***Concealed Evidence***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Inspector Haines

LOCALE: England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The nephew's answers had been too pat . . . and the Inspector had a clue that fitted the nephew like a glove . . .*

AS OUR CAR TURNED INTO THE OLD Victorian house called Greystones, Inspector Haines said, "You've lost your bet, sergeant. Harry Carter's still here."

"Yes, sir," I felt cheated. Carter had looked the neurotic type who would feel squeamish about living with the ghost of the man he had murdered.

Haines went on, "Still, you were right about him being our man. Between you and me, I felt pretty sure too, in spite of his neat alibi."

"On the strength of his record?"

Inspector Haines shook his head. "No. You can't brand a man as a killer because he once did a month for larceny. But his answers were too pat—as if he'd rehearsed them—and that's always a bad sign."

I nodded, recalling those glib comments—too glib, as the Inspector had said, for a man who seemed unable to relax, a man who had just found his uncle electrocuted.

Oh, no, he wasn't there when it happened; he was at his young lady's flat, and the young lady would vouch . . .

Yes, his Uncle James *would* tinker with the electricity, especially the greenhouse installation . . .

No, it might not have killed a normal man, but then his uncle was over 70, and his heart, you know . . .

The rubber gloves? Yes, it was true what Mrs. Laker, the domestic,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had said. Uncle James *did* keep rubber gloves in the greenhouse, and often wore them, but apparently on this occasion . . .

A legacy? Oh, well, he had expected his uncle to leave him a bit, but he hadn't a clue how much; probably not a lot, he couldn't have been very well off . . .

Harry Carter had not been a good liar, even if the responses were cut-and-dried.

James Carter had left £5000 actually—a glittering prize for his only legatee, Harry. Enough to clear all his debts, enough to buy the collusion—and the affection—of the trollop he called "my young lady." . . .

The man we wanted to talk to was bending over the engine of an old car when Inspector Haines and I drove alongside the stable building now used as a garage.

He looked up, surprised. "Oh . . . it's you again, Inspector. I wasn't expecting you quite so soon."

"Just a few loose ends," Haines said. He watched Carter wipe his hands on a greasy rag. "Mucky job, that messing with car engines."

"Yes, but it's my hobby."

"Why not wear rubber gloves?"

Carter threw Haines a quick smile, nervous and twitching.

"I'm afraid I don't like them—never had any use for them."

"It's a matter of taste," Haines shrugged.

"Yes. You had something else to ask me?"

The Inspector said, "We think someone tampered with the electrical installation in the greenhouse, knowing your uncle would take immediate steps to put it right."

"Surely not? Who?" Then conscious of the Inspector's fixed gaze: "You aren't suggesting . . . ? I've already said I wasn't here. My young lady will tell you . . ."

"Yes, you've told us that. Mrs. Laker says your uncle always turned off the current at the main switch before tinkering with the electricity."

Carter frowned. "Yes, I suppose he would. I wasn't here all the time, so I can't say exactly."

Haines broke in, "And when he went to the greenhouse, perhaps somebody switched the main current on again?"

"I can't think who, Inspector. But wouldn't you have found fingerprints on the main switch?—or somewhere on the greenhouse installation?"

"We might have, Mr. Carter, but didn't. Rather odd, wasn't it? Unless, of course, the person concerned wore rubber gloves?"

Carter bit his lip. "Yes, that's likely."

"The gloves were not in the greenhouse when your uncle needed them," Haines added; then, after a pause, "The gloves you wore to set the stage for your uncle's murder, afterwards leaving them where they belonged, in the greenhouse?"

"Me?" Carter flushed. "This is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a monstrous accusation, Inspector! And even if I—if somebody—did wear the gloves, you would have no proof of such a thing!"

Haines smiled. "I'm sorry, Mr. Carter, but we have."

"That isn't possible—I don't believe you."

The flush on the man's face slowly gave way to his natural pallor, now even more bloodless than usual.

"When you put on rubber gloves to avoid leaving fingerprints—an expedient to which, I believe, you had recourse once before—you overlooked something quite vital. You *were* here when your uncle was murdered. You had been tinkering with your car, and your hands were greasy, as they are now . . ." The Inspector paused. "You said just now that you never wear rubber gloves. But you wore them the day that your uncle died—your uncle's gloves. But they didn't help you, because you *did* leave fingerprints after all."

Carter looked at the Inspector with bewildered eyes.

The Inspector hammered home his point. "You left your prints on the *inside* of the fingers of the gloves, Mr. Carter. Now . . . is there anything else you would like to say?"

NOW... EVERY COPY OF ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine AT YOUR FINGERTIPS WITH THIS BEAUTIFUL BINDER ONLY $2.50 EACH

Satisfaction guaranteed.
Allow 30 days for delivery.

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine
505 Park Avenue / New York 22, N.Y.

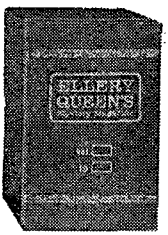
Please send me_____EQMM Binders.

I enclose $_____, at $2.50 each ($3.50 each outside U.S.A. and possessions).

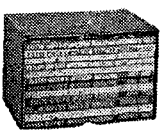
Name_____
(please print)

Address_____

City_____Zone___State_____



Front View


Back View

- No more lost issues
- Keeps copies in perfect condition
- Beautiful addition to any bookshelf
- Rich leatherette finish
- Embossed in 16k gold
- Custom made to hold 12 issues
- Gold signature foil

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**BORDEN DEAL**
TITLE:	***Tough Cop***
TYPE:	Detective Story à la **Black Mask**
DETECTIVE:	Mr. John
LOCALE:	A small town in the United States
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Miss Millie had been his old schoolteacher, 'way back in the tenth grade; and now she had been brutally murdered . . . Mr. John was glad he was a tough cop.*

I'M TOUGH ENOUGH, THOUGH IT'S not anything to brag about. It's part of my job—like being a good typist for a secretary or liking people for a politician. I catch most of the dirty work, not just because I'm tough but because I look tough. That's part of my natural equipment, too.

It doesn't bother me. I can look into the mirror every morning and shave that ugly mug of mine—with the underslung jaw and the little eyes and the nose that got broken twice when I tried to do a little boxing in my younger days—without worrying that I'm not Tony Curtis. There's a lot of satisfaction in knowing that you're good at the work you do. My face and my big hands and my hulking shoulders are just as much a part of my equipment as the gun on my hip.

I do a lot of the interrogation. So I wasn't surprised to get a call from the jail asking me to come down and question a suspect in the Miss Millie Burden killing. I was still out at the Burden house, watching the younger fellows go through the routines they learned at the F.B.I. school. The body was already gone by then, and there was really no use in my hanging around there any more.

But I did. I'd known Miss Millie

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for a long time. A small town like ours, you know everybody. Miss Millie had taught me in the tenth grade at school. She was a little sprite of a woman with a sharp kindly face, one of the toughest teachers in the school, the kind of tough teacher that you either like a lot or you hate the guts of. I'd always liked her. And now she had had her brains knocked out of her head all over her kitchen floor.

She lived alone. It was the big old house the Burdens had always lived in. They were all gone now but Miss Millie. She'd retired from teaching long since, of course, living on her social security and the little bit of Burden money that was still left—nobody knew how much or how little it was—and puttering around in her garden all day every day.

I looked around the kitchen one more time after I put down the phone. "They've got somebody down at the jail," I said to the eager bloodhounds.

They stopped hound-dogging and looked up at me, their faces blank and somewhat disappointed because the suspect had been picked up by the old police routine instead of being detected by their new methods.

"Found any fingerprints?" I asked them.

One of them shook his head. "Whoever did the job was careful," he said. "No prints here but Miss Burden's."

I nodded. "I'm going down to the jail," I said.

I walked through the hall of the big silent house and out onto the porch. I went down the walk to my car and got in. I looked back toward the house, wondering what was going to happen to it now. It was a shame. Some people you expect to die violently—but not Miss Millie. I shook my head and went on.

I was at the jail in ten minutes. I walked into the office and looked at the Sheriff and the Chief of Police. They were both big men, but the Chief had a pleasant face, full of smiling. The Sheriff was a grim and impressive man. The Chief had been on the force nearly as long as I had been, and the Sheriff had been in and out of office almost as long.

"Have you got him?" I said.

"We haven't talked to him yet," the Sheriff said. "We were waiting for you, Mr. John."

I nodded. "What's the deal?"

"He was picked up out on the highway, trying to hitchhike out of town," the Sheriff said. "We got him on a routine sweep of strangers and suspicious characters as soon as we heard about Miss Millie."

I nodded again. "It figured to be simple," I said. "Let's go look at him."

The Sheriff picked up his hat. "I'll check my men," he said. "No use me hanging around here. You can handle it from here on."

"Sure," I said. "See you."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He bobbed his head and went out. I led the way back to the cells. The kid was sitting on a bunk, staring down at the floor between his feet. He looked up when I stopped in front of the cell door.

"Searched him yet?" I said to the policeman guarding him.

"No, sir, Mr. John," he said. "The Sheriff shook him down for weapons. But we waited for you."

I nodded. That was the way I liked it. There's an art to interrogation. If I was going to do the job, I didn't want anybody messing up the field beforehand.

I opened the cell door. "What's your name, kid?"

He looked up at me. He was young. He was scared and defiant at the same time. "Billy Roberts," he said.

I paused, studying him for a moment. His face was dirty but it was the open, friendly kind of face you can like right off the bat. There was nothing to him of the television juvenile delinquent—his hair was cropped close to his head in a crew cut and he didn't wear any of the television-type clothing. He had on a pair of shabby pants and a fairly new sports shirt. His hair was sandy, with a touch of red in it, and if he ever washed his face you'd probably see freckles there. I thought of Miss Millie. Just the kind of guy she'd bring into her kitchen to feed him a meal.

"Come along," I said. "And bring that." I motioned to the battered suitcase resting against the bars on the outside of the cell.

I turned my back and walked along the corridor. I didn't look back to see if he followed. That was the job of the patrolman. I was already working on the interrogation procedure, you see, and I had to let just enough of my toughness show to make him uncertain about his own stamina.

The Chief came along, too. I led the way to the Interrogation Room. It's a plain room with a table in the middle where we drink—coffee, usually—but all that had been cleared out for this job. I stopped and turned around.

"Empty your pockets," I said.

His voice was high, jerky. "I didn't do anything," he said. "I tell you."

I kept on looking at him. "Empty your pockets," I said again in a reasonable voice.

He jerked his hands toward his pockets and began turning them out. There was a small penknife, a book of matches, a package of cigarettes, a wallet, a few coins. That was all.

I picked up the wallet in my big hands and looked inside. There was a dollar in the bill compartment. I began probing the card sections with a thick finger, taking out his driver's license and photographs, all the junk everybody carries around. Then I hit paydirt. In the last compartment, folded thin, I found some bills. There were a good many of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them, mostly fives and tens, with two or three twenties. I guess there was maybe a hundred and fifty dollars all told.

"Where did you get the money?" I said.

His face closed up tight and stubborn. I stood watching him for a moment, holding the bills. They were old bills, worn and crumpled, and they felt gritty under my fingertips. I looked at them closely, then shook them against the table. Tiny white crystals shook off onto the surface. I thought about the sugar bowl in Miss Millie's kitchen. It had been smashed on the floor, the white sugar spilled out of its brokenness just like her brains had spilled out of her broken head.

"Where did you get the money?" I said.

"It's mine," he said in his high jerky voice.

"Sure," I said. "But where did you get it?"

"I was working for a circus," he said. "Up until a week ago. Cosmos Brothers. They were about to fold, so I blew the lot before they started skipping paydays. That's the money I saved."

"What did you do?"

"I was an elephant man," he said. "You know . . ."

"An elephant man with a circus can save that kind of money?"

His face closed up again. He reached for the cigarettes and fumbled one out of the pack. I waited until he had put it into his mouth and had reached for the book of matches.

"Leave the cigarettes alone, kid," I said.

He looked at me without believing. I took the cigarette out of his mouth and put it into my own. I lit it, slowly, watching his face hungry for the steadying assurance of the tobacco. I puffed the smoke at him.

"Let's see what's in the suitcase."

The Chief and the patrolman watched as the kid lifted the suitcase to the table and opened it. I poked at the jumbled clothing inside—another pair of pants, two shirts, and some underwear. I tumbled it out, dropping it on the floor piece by piece as I went through.

Then I turned my attention to the suitcase itself. In one pocket there was a toothbrush and a razor and a bar of soap wrapped in toilet paper. In the other was a watch. I took it out, looked at it, and laid it on the table.

I heard the Chief's breath suck in. It was an old-fashioned lapel watch, like ladies used to wear. Miss Millie Burden had worn it when she taught me in the tenth grade. I could still remember her gesture when she'd tilt it with one finger and look to see if the class period was nearly over.

I turned to the kid again. "You didn't have to kill the old lady," I said in my slow even voice. "You could have robbed her without that, an old lady like her."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His face paled. His eyes wavered away from my face and he looked desperately around at the other men. "I didn't kill anybody," he said. "Honest. I didn't even know that was why I was picked up."

I watched him for a moment. Then I winked at the Chief when the kid wasn't looking at either one of us.

"We're fixing to find out about that right now," I said.

"Mr. John," the Chief said in a nervous voice, picking up his cue.

I ignored him. I went to one of the lockers and opened it. I took out a soiled white kid glove with heavy ridges on the back. I took out a length of rubber hose and a pair of lemon squeezers. I brought them to the table and laid them down.

"Mr. John," the Chief said again, this time in a tighter voice.

I looked at him then. "I'm going to find out," I said in a quiet voice. "Miss Millie was my teacher in the tenth grade. She was a fine old lady."

"Don't get personal about it, Mr. John," he said. He motioned toward the equipment on the table. "I've warned you about these things."

"If you don't like it, fire me. But just give me half an hour," I said. "I'll know by then."

The kid was looking at the Chief's kindly face. He watched the Chief's eyes waver away from mine, saw him turn his back. "I'd better go see how the men are doing," he said, muttering the words as he hurried out of the room.

It was pretty much of a standard routine that we'd worked out over the years. It made me the villain of the piece and later on, if need be, the Chief could come back and be buddy-buddy with the suspect. Usually he didn't have to work that part. Not after I got through.

Now, I'm not fond of the third-degree method, even if I am tough enough for my job. I've always considered it a failure when I had to lay a hand on a guy. It's all in the atmosphere. If you can shake the bravado out of him you'll generally get close enough to the truth. Lots of guys you can hurt and never find out a thing. Most guys can stand hurting a lot better than they can stand the thought of hurting.

I nodded at the patrolman and he went out too. Then I looked at the kid again.

"Let's start telling," I said.

He was as pale as clay. His hands lying on the table were trembling and he knotted them together. "There's nothing to tell," he said. "I don't know what you're talking about."

I picked up the rubber hose and bounced it off the palm of my hand. I kept on bouncing it and his eyes followed it, hypnotized, as it moved limberly in my hand.

"That old lady was lying up there on the kitchen floor with her head bashed in," I said in a quiet voice. "You didn't even do it until

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you'd eaten the meal that she gave you, there on the end of the kitchen table. Or maybe you killed her and then ate the meal. I don't know. Then you searched the house. You found the money. You took the lapel watch off of her body. Then you left. Like an idiot, you started right out of town on the highway, where you were picked up. Didn't you know you'd be picked up? Wasn't that kind of stupid of you?"

"I didn't kill her," he said. His voice was low, hopeless. But it was insistent.

"Take off your shirt," I said.

His hands flew to the buttons as though he was glad to please me with something. He fumbled at the job and it took him a while to get the first three buttons undone. Then he stopped.

"All right," he said. "I'll tell you about it."

"Talk," I said, not easing the pressure at all.

"There was a guy," he said in a fast voice. "I met him out by the railroad tracks, where I was planning to spend the night. He was drunk and he offered me a drink. He had two pints of Cabin Hollow corn whiskey. We had some drinks together. After a while he passed out." He looked up at me. He had some of his defiance back. "So I rolled him. That's where I got the watch and the money. He had all that money on him."

"That's a pretty good story," I said. "Too bad it's not the truth."

"It is the truth. He was already drunk when I got with him. He passed out in fifteen minutes." He wrinkled up his face. "And that corn whiskey—it was awful . . ." His voice ran down.

"Describe the man."

"He was tall, shabbier-looking than me. He had a long face and real big hands. His skin was dead-white and he was nearly bald. His feet were big, too. I remember them."

I put the rubber hose down on the table. I sat down in a chair. I looked at the boy. I hadn't really looked at him before. You don't want to look too deep into a guy you've got to get tough with. Just let him be a face where you can see the reactions moving through him, see whether you're succeeding or not.

But I really looked at him now. He had a friendly kind of face. There was the kind of toughness there you pick up when you're on the road young. But it was an open face, too, in spite of being frightened and nervous. You could tell he'd been picked up in strange towns before.

When you've been a cop as long as I have, you go on instinct more than you go on fact. That's why I don't have much use for these young fellows and their F.B.I.-taught methods—they don't leave any room for a cop's instinct.

The kid's story had the feel of truth in it. Looking at him, I just

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

knew in my bones he was the kind that was perfectly capable of rolling a drunk. But the capability in him didn't reach as far as cold-blooded murder. There were no real facts to pin it on, only his bald statement—except that he'd described very accurately our town drunk. But I knew that I had hold of the truth now, like holding one end of a string.

I know that a man can kill his mother and smile and smile and keep smiling. But I could feel the innocence in this kid, and that was why I'd been uneasy ever since I'd first laid eyes on him, why I'd had to push myself through the routines of the questioning. Hell, I liked the kid. If he had really murdered old Miss Burden, I just couldn't have liked him.

He began to get more and more nervous as I sat staring at him. He couldn't look directly at me, and he couldn't look away.

"Where are you from, son?" I said finally. "What are you doing on the road, anyway?"

"I'm from Canton, Missouri," he said. He tried to smile but he didn't make much out of it. "I'm on the road because I just like to travel, I guess."

"Where did you pick up the description of the man you said you rolled?" I said. "Did you see him on the street somewhere?"

He made a brave show of looking straight into my eyes but he couldn't manage it. "I met him out by the railroad yards," he said. "Like I said."

I got up from the chair. I went to the door and called the patrolman. "Take him back to his cell," I told him.

I watched the two of them go down the corridor. The boy, from the back, had a good pair of shoulders, leaning down to narrow hips. He'd never be a slob like me. I've always been big-hipped, even when I was a kid. Well, a man gets used to his own ugliness, I reckon—especially when it's useful in his work. I went to the office. The Chief looked up from his desk when I came in. "Is he ready for a statement?" he said. He motioned toward a patrolman. "Sam here is waiting to take it down when you're ready."

"No," I said. "He's not ready."

The Chief lifted his head again, looking at me sharply. "What's the matter, Mr. John?"

"Maybe there won't be a statement," I said. "Maybe the boy is innocent."

"Oh, for Pete's sake," the Chief said. "You expect us to start believing in miracles? He's a road kid. He's got the money on him and he's got the watch. I figure it would take a jury about fifteen minutes. What more do you want?"

I could feel the stubbornness coming up in me. The same kind of stubbornness that the boy had shown. "I don't doubt that," I said. "Nobody would feel very bad about

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hanging Miss Burden's murder on him. The Prosecutor could rant and rave to his heart's content. The Judge could be wise and legal. The jury could be self-righteous as hell. A good time would be had by all."

"What's the matter with you, anyway?"

I laid my hand flat on his desk, leaning on it. "I tell you he's not guilty."

He drew away from me. I kept on looking at him. I was on the force before he was. He was Chief now and I would never be Chief—never in a million years. But he knew me. I was Mr. John.

"What makes you think so?" he said in a respectful voice.

I relaxed. "He's got a good story," I said. "A pretty good story. Told me how he got the money and the watch. He found Peanuts Morgan drunk and he rolled him."

"How do you know it was Peanuts?"

"Described him to a T. You couldn't mistake him for anybody else."

The Chief sat still for a moment in thought. Peanuts Morgan was the town character. An alcoholic, he was dim-witted in an amiable sort of way. He lived in an old shack out across the railroad tracks, making his living and his drinking money by shining shoes on the Square, by running errands, and by begging. Once in a while we had to pick him up and dry him out. People remembered when he was a star basketball player—that was a lot of years ago—and once in a while they'd give him enough money or whiskey to really tie one on.

"Peanuts isn't exactly an upright citizen," the Chief said. "But he's always been as harmless as they come."

"He murdered Miss Millie," I said violently.

"How do you figure that? Just because the kid . . . Why, that kid would lie in his teeth to get out of this rap."

I was breathing hard. "He wasn't lying," I said. "And it would be easy for Peanuts. You know Miss Millie fed him now and then because she taught him in school. She wouldn't pay any attention to him. Maybe while he was eating she took the money out of the sugar bowl for some reason. He took one look and went crazy in the head, thinking about how much liquor all that money would buy."

The Chief sighed. "All right," he said. "We'll pick him up."

"I'll pick him up," I said. "And when I get him I'm going to learn the truth."

"Sure," the Chief said soothingly. "We'll work the same game."

I stopped at the door. "You can't scare Peanuts," I said. "He's not bright enough." I could feel the grimness in my mind. "But I'll get the truth. The only way there is to get it."

I didn't bother to look for him downtown. I headed out across the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

railroad tracks toward his shack. I was driving fast when I bounced across the high railroadgrade and went down the other side. I could feel the conviction riding me hard and I couldn't wait to prove that me and the boy were right. It's crazy when you think about it. A tough cop like me, who's heard it all, the way I began believing that boy the minute I looked at him.

It wasn't anything I could put my finger on. But I've listened to men lying for years. Most people just automatically lie to a cop. And you get to where you can feel the guilt inside of them, no matter what their face or their voice is saying. But that kind was as open as a book.

I banged on the door of the shack, then I shoved it open. Peanuts was lying on his broken-down bed, snoring. I went over to him, grabbed him by the shoulder, jerked him off the bed. He came up thrashing and yelling. I jammed him back against the wall and put the cuffs on him. I fanned him but he didn't have a thing except a nearly empty pint of Cabin Hollow corn in his front overalls pocket. I looked at it, tossed it on the bed.

"What . . . what's the trouble, Mr. John?" Peanuts said in a shaking voice.

I put my face close to his. "Why did you kill Miss Millie?"

He collapsed. I could see the collapse inside his raddled face. I shoved him toward the door without waiting for an answer, stooping to pick up the pint bottle, and hustled him to the car.

In five minutes we were back in the jail. I led him into and through the Chief's office, shaking my head when he started to rise from his desk to follow us. I put him into a chair in the Interrogation Room.

He was shaking all over. "My God, Mr. John," he said. "Whatever makes you think I killed Miss Millie? Why, she fed me, she . . ."

I stared down at him. He was a wreck of a man. He'd been a star basketball center on the high school team many years ago. He'd been tall enough for the job, fast enough. For two seasons, mostly because of him, the local team was undefeated. Now he was a raddled, half-witted bum, no use to himself or anybody else.

"Where did you get the whiskey?" I said.

He brightened. "A kid gave it to me. Took it right out of his suitcase and told me I could have it. He had two whole pints and he . . ."

I could feel myself getting mad. He was dim-witted, all right, but not so he couldn't think of something. They can all think of something when it's murder.

"You're going to confess," I told him. I could feel the hardness in my voice. "Before I leave this room you're going to sign a statement."

He looked into my ugly face and shrank back into his chair from what he saw.

Forty-five minutes later I walked

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into the Chief's office. I was sweating and shaking in a way I'd never been before. I'd done things I'd never done before, too.

"Go on in and take it down," I said to the patrolman. "Tell him I said word for word, or I'm coming back in there."

The patrolman went out with his shorthand pad. The Chief stared at me. "You mean he confessed?"

"He confessed," I said. "It was him, just like I told you."

I stood up, then, and picked up the key ring. I went back down the corridor to the boy's cell. I unlocked the door and opened it.

"All right," I said. "I got it out of him."

I watched his face. It lit up from inside and it came all the way out, the way he was feeling. I guess my face was trying to show something, too. He stood up from the bunk and for the first time he was really shook.

"You mean—you mean I can go now? I don't have to . . ."

"Not yet," I said. "There'll be a trial and you'll be the principal witness. About him having the whiskey and the money and the watch. That, together with his confession . . . It'll be next week, because court session starts then and this town won't want to wait a year to see justice done."

"Do I have to stay in jail until then?"

I thought about it. "If you won't leave town . . ."

His shoulders slumped. "How can I stay?" he said. "No place to live, no money to eat on. I guess I'll have to stay in jail."

"You can come out to my place," I said then. "If you want to do that."

He looked at me and for the first time he smiled. It was a good kind of smile, that warmed you all the way through and made you grateful you'd been able to do something to bring it out.

He stayed at my place on the lake for three days. I was glad to have him because it's lonesome out there sometimes. Besides, I liked the kid the minute I laid eyes on him. He was grateful to me for saving his neck, too, and that's not hard to take, even when you're a tough cop. Maybe especially when you're a tough cop.

I took him fishing a couple of times. He liked that. We talked a lot, when I was off-duty and could spend time out there. He was nervous about the trial, but I assured him. I told him he wouldn't even need a court-appointed attorney, because there wouldn't be any charges against him for rolling Peanuts. I'd see to that.

I'd never had a visitor before. I keep pretty much to myself, anyway. I never could find a woman who could stand my ugly face and my rough ways, and most people don't trust a cop enough to like him. So off-duty I read a good bit and I fished a lot, a lonely kind of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

life but all right for the likes of me.

I enjoyed having the boy around. I might as well admit it. He softened me, maybe, had from the very first, but maybe a guy needs softening once in a while. If I'd ever had a son, I'd have wanted him to be like Billy Roberts. But then if I'd had a son he'd have probably looked just like me.

On the third day Peanuts Morgan hung himself in his cell. I found out about it when I checked in. I went right back to the cabin. Billy was sitting on the screened porch when I drove up. I got out of the car and went up the steps, opened the screen door.

"Well," I said. "There won't be a trial after all."

He looked up at me very quickly. "What happened?" He started standing up.

"Peanuts Morgan killed himself," I said. "Hung himself in his cell last night, with the belt that the stupid jailer forgot to take away from him."

Billy sat down slowly. "Now why would he do a thing like that?"

"I guess he finally sobered up enough to realize what he'd done, to understand that he was going to die in the electric chair," I said. "Either that, or be sent to the hospital for the criminally insane."

Billy put his hands over his face. I could see that he was shaking. "That poor guy," he said.

"Don't let it throw you," I said. "It's just one of those things."

He looked at me in a peculiar sort of way. "I guess I'd better be on my way," he said. "I want to thank you, Mr. John, for all that you've done." He shivered. "If it hadn't been for you, it would have been me in that cell."

I looked into his face. "You don't have to go," I said. "I can find you a job here, a good job. You can stay out here with me until you get on your feet. You've got to quit rambling one of these days, son. It might as well be here and now. Maybe the next trouble you get into . . ."

His face sobered. "You're right, Mr. John," he said. "But I'm going home." He lifted his head, looking at me. "I owe it to my family, Mr. John. Go back and show them I'm through with living the way I've been living. Maybe one of these days I can come back here."

I hated to see him go. But it satisfied me. He went inside and packed his old suitcase. Then I volunteered to drive him out to the highway. I could have offered him money for a bus ticket, but I knew he wouldn't take it.

We were silent in the car. There wasn't much to say, I guess. It had been a good time, having that boy staying with me, and now it was over and I was still a tough cop in a small town.

I stopped the car at a good place for hitchhiking and got out of the car when he got out. He hefted his suitcase in one hand.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Goodbye, Mr. John," he said.

"Goodbye, son," I said. "Keep your nose clean now. You might not be so lucky next time."

I don't know why. Maybe he just couldn't hold it in any longer. Maybe he couldn't bear me not knowing what I'd done. Maybe he wanted to show me how soft I'd gone inside.

"You're right," he said. His face did not change at all—it stayed open and friendly and handsome as all hell; the face of a nice kid that even a tough old cop like me couldn't help but like. "It would be hard to find another cop as stupid as you are."

It was like a blow in the face.

I shocked back an involuntary step, the way a man does when he's hit by a bullet.

"You killed her," I said.

"Sure," he said. "I knocked off the old lady."

I took a step toward him. "You . . ."

"What are you going to do about it?" he said. "Take me back and tell them you made a little mistake, that you beat a confession out of the wrong man and now that man has killed himself? You're hooked, copper. You're hooked good and solid. You can't ever tell anybody what you did."

He was dead-right. I could never tell them how wrong I'd been. Besides, Peanuts was dead now. Dead and gone. With his signed confession that I guess any man, dim-witted and addled with whiskey or not would have signed to stop what I was doing to him.

But my boy Billy forgot one thing. I'm tough enough for the job. For any job that comes along. He forgot that one thing.

I shot him right between the eyes. And I watched him kick and fall.

NEXT MONTH . . .

another ALL-STAR ISSUE—including *new* stories by

VICTOR CANNING

AVRAM DAVIDSON

ROBERT EDMOND ALTER

FLETCHER FLORA

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **THEODORE STURGEON**

TITLE: ***The Abominable House Guest***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Future?

COMMENTS: *When Fluffy finally did something about Ransome (an obnoxious freeloader, sponger, and worse), he did it in a peculiarly feline way . . .*

RANSOME LAY IN THE DARK AND smiled to himself, thinking about his hostess. Ransome was always in demand as a house guest, purely because of his phenomenal abilities as a raconteur. Said abilities were entirely due to his being so often a house guest, for it was the terse beauty of his word pictures of people and their opinions of people that made him the figure he was. And all those clipped ironies had to do with the people he had met last week-end. Staying a while at the Joneses, he could quietly insinuate the most scandalously hilarious things about the Joneses when he week-ended with the Browns the following fortnight. You think Mr. and Mrs. Jones resented that? Ah, no. You should hear the dirt on the Browns! And so it went, a two-dimensional spiral on the social plane.

This wasn't the Joneses or the Browns, though. This was Mrs. Benedetto's ménage; and to Ransome's somewhat jaded sense of humor the widow Benedetto was a godsend. She lived in a world of her own, which was apparently set about with quasi-important ancestors and relatives, exactly as her living room was cluttered up with perfectly unmentionable examples of Victorian rococo.

Mrs. Benedetto did not live alone. Far from it. Her very life, to paraphrase the lady herself, was wound about, was caught up in, was owned by and dedicated to her baby. Her baby was her beloved, her little beauty, her too darling my dear,

Copyright 1953 by Theodore Sturgeon; originally titled, "Fluffy."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and—so help me—her boobly wutsi-wutsikins. In himself he was quite a character. He answered to the name of Bubbles, which was inaccurate and offended his dignity. He had been christened Fluffy, but you know how it is with nicknames. He was large and he was sleek, that paragon among animals, a chastened alley cat.

Wonderful things, cats. A cat is the only animal which can live like a parasite and maintain to the utmost its ability to take care of itself. You've heard of little lost dogs, but you never heard of a lost cat. Cats don't get lost, because cats don't belong anywhere. You wouldn't get Mrs. Benedetto to believe that. Mrs. Benedetto never thought of putting Fluffy's devotion to the test by declaring a ten-day moratorium on the canned salmon. If she had, she would have uncovered a sense of honor comparable with that of a bedbug's.

Knowing this—Ransome pardoned himself the pun—categorically, Ransome found himself vastly amused. Mrs. Benedetto's ministrations to the phlegmatic Fluffy were positively orgiastic. As he thought of it in detail, he began to feel that perhaps, after all, Fluffy was something of a feline phenomenon. A cat's ears are sensitive organs; any living being that could abide Mrs. Benedetto's constant flow of conversation from dawn till dark, and then hear it subside in sleep only to be replaced by resounding snores—well, that *was* phenomenal.

And Fluffy had stood it for four years. Cats are not renowned for their patience. They have, however, a very fine sense of values. Fluffy was getting something out of it—worth considerably more to him than the discomforts he endured, for no cat likes to break even.

Ransome lay still, marveling at the carrying power of the widow's snores. He knew little of the late Mr. Benedetto, but he gathered now that he had been either a man of saintly patience, a masochist, or a deaf-mute. A noise like that from just one stringy throat must be an impossibility, and yet, there it was.

Ransome liked to imagine that the woman had calluses on her palate and tonsils, grown there from her conversation, and it was these rasping together that produced the curious dry-leather quality of her snores. He tucked the idea away for future reference. He might use it next week-end. The snores were hardly the gentlest of lullabies, but any sound is soothing if it is repeated often enough.

There is an old story about a lighthouse tender whose lighthouse was equipped with an automatic cannon which fired every fifteen minutes, day and night. One night, when the old man was asleep, the gun failed to go off. Three seconds after, the old fellow was out of his bed and flailing around the room, shouting, "What was that?" And so it was with Ransome.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He couldn't tell whether it was an hour after he had fallen asleep, or whether he had not fallen asleep at all. But he found himself sitting on the edge of the bed, wide awake, straining every nerve for the source of the—what was it?—sound?—that had awakened him.

The old house was as quiet as a city morgue after closing time, and he could see nothing in the tall dark guestroom but the moon-silvered windows and the thick blacknesses that were drapes. Any old damn thing might be hiding behind those drapes, he thought comfortingly. He edged himself back on the bed and quickly snatched his feet off the floor. Not that anything was under the bed, but still—

A white object puffed along the floor, through the moonbeams, toward him. He made no sound, but tensed himself, ready to attack or defend, dodge or retreat. Ransome was by no means an admirable character, but he owed his reputation, and therefore his existence, to this particular trait—the ability to poise himself, invulnerable to surprise.

The white object paused to stare at him out of its yellow-green eyes. It was only Fluffy—Fluffy looking casual and easy-going and not at all in a mood to frighten people. In fact, he looked up at Ransome's gradually relaxing bulk and raised a longhaired, quizzical eyebrow, as if he rather enjoyed the man's discomfiture.

Ransome withstood the cat's gaze with suavity, and stretched himself out on the bed with every bit of Fluffy's own easy grace. "Well," he said amusedly, "you gave me a jolt! Weren't you taught to knock before you entered a gentleman's boudoir?"

Fluffy raised a velvet paw and touched it pinkly with his tongue. "Do you take me for a barbarian?" he asked.

Ransome's lids seemed to get heavy, the only sign he ever gave of being taken aback. He didn't believe for a moment that the cat had really spoken—this was, of course, someone's idea of a joke.

Good God—it has to be a joke!

"You didn't say anything, of course," he told the cat, "but if you did, what was it?"

"You heard me the first time," said the cat, and jumped up on the foot of his bed.

Ransome inched back from the animal. "Yes, I thought I did. You know," he said, with an attempt at jocularity, "you should, under these circumstances, have written me a note before you knocked."

"I refuse to be burdened with the so-called social amenities," said Fluffy. His coat was spotlessly clean, and he looked like an advertising photograph for eiderdown, but he began to wash carefully. "I don't like you, Ransome."

"Thanks," chuckled Ransome, surprised. "I don't like you either."

"Why?" asked Fluffy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ransome told himself silently that he was damned. He held tight to a mind that would begin to reel on slight provocation, and, as usual when bemused, he flung out a smoke screen of his own variety of glib chatter.

"Reasons for not liking you," he said, "are legion. They are all included in the one phrase—'You are a cat!'"

"I have heard you say that at least twice before," said Fluffy, "except that you have now substituted 'cat' for 'Woman.'"

"Your attitude is offensive. Is any given truth any the less true for having been uttered more than once?"

"No," said the cat with equanimity. "But it is just that more clichéd."

Ransome laughed. "Quite aside from the fact that you can talk, I find you most refreshing. No one has ever criticized my particular variety of repartee before."

"No one was ever wise to you before," said the cat. "Why don't you like cats?"

A question like that was, to Ransome, the pressing of a button which released ordered phrases. "Cats," he said oratorically, "are without doubt the most self-centered, ungrateful, hypocritical creatures on this or any other earth. Spawned from a mésalliance between Lilith and Satan—"

Fluffy's eyes widened. "Ah! An antiquarian!" he whispered.

"—they have the worst traits of both. Their best qualities are their beauty of form and of motion, and even these breathe vile. Women are the ficklest of bipeds, but few women are as fickle as, by nature, any cat is. Cats are not true. They are impossibilities, as perfection is impossible. No other living creature moves with utterly perfect grace. Only the dead can so perfectly relax. And nothing—simply nothing at all—transcends a cat's incomparable insincerity."

Fluffy purred.

"Pussy! Sit-by-the-fire and sing!" spat Ransome. "Smiling up, all bearers of liver and salmon and catnip! Soft little puffball, bundle of joy, playing with a ball on a string, making children clap their soft hands to see you, while your mean little brain is viciously alight with the pictures your play calls for you. Bite it to make it bleed; hold it till it all but throttles; lay it lown and step about it daintily; prod it with a gentle silken paw until it moves again, and then pounce. Clasp it in your talons then, lift it, roll over with it, sink your cruel teeth into it while you pump out its guts with your hind feet. Ball on a string! Play-actor!"

Fluffy fawned. "To quote you, that is the prettiest piece of emotional claptrap that these old ears have ever heard. A triumph in studied spontaneity. A symphony in cynicism. A poem in perception. The unqualified—"

Ransome grunted. He deeply re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sented this flamboyant theft of all his pet phrases, but his lip twitched nevertheless. The cat was indeed an observant animal.

"—epitome of understatement," Fluffy finished smoothly. "To listen to you, one would think that you would like to slaughter earth's felinity."

"I would," gritted Ransome.

"It would be a favor to us," said the cat. "We would keep ourselves vastly amused, eluding you and laughing at the effort it cost you. Humans lack imagination."

"Superior creature," said Ransome ironically, "why don't you do away with the human race, if you find us a bore?"

"You think we couldn't?" responded Fluffy. "We can outthink, outrun, and outbreed your kind. But why should we? As long as you act as you have for these last few thousand years, feeding us, sheltering us, and asking nothing from us but our presence for purposes of admiration—why then, you may remain here."

Ransome guffawed. "Nice of you! But listen—stop your bland discussion of the abstract and tell me some things I want to know. How can you talk, and why did you pick me to talk to?"

Fluffy settled himself. "I shall answer the question socratically. Socrates was a Greek, and so I shall begin with your last questions. What do you do for a living?"

"Why I—I have some investments and a small capital, and the interest—" Ransome stopped, for the first time fumbling for words.

Fluffy was nodding knowingly. "All right, all right. Come clean. You can speak freely."

Ransome grinned. "Well, if you must know—and you seem to—I am a practically permanent house guest. I have a considerable fund of stories and a talent for telling them. I look presentable and act as if I were a gentleman. I negotiate, at times, small loans—"

"A loan," said Fluffy authoritatively, "is something one intends to repay."

"We'll call them loans," said Ransome airily. "Also, at one time and another, I exact a reasonable fee for certain services rendered—"

"Blackmail," said the cat.

"Don't be crude. All in all, I find life a comfortable and engrossing thing."

"Q. E. D.," said Fluffy triumphantly "You make your living being scintilliant, beautiful to look at. So do I. You help nobody but yourself; you help yourself to anything you want. So do I. No one likes you except those you bleed; everyone admires and envies you. So with me. Get the point?"

"I think so. Cat, you draw a mean parallel. In other words, you consider my behavior catlike."

"Precisely," said Fluffy through his whiskers. "And that is both why and how I can talk with you. You're so close to the feline in ev-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

erything you do and think; your whole basic philosophy is that of a cat. You have a feline aura about you so intense that it contacts mine; hence we find each other intelligible."

"I don't understand that," said Ransome.

"Neither do I," returned Fluffy. "But there it is. Do you like Mrs. Benedetto?"

"No!" said Ransome immediately and with considerable emphasis. "She is absolutely insufferable. She bores me. She irritates me. She is the only woman in the world who can do both those things to me at the same time. She talks too much. She reads too little. She thinks not at all. Her mind is hysterically hidebound. She has a face like the cover of a book that no one has ever wanted to read. She is built like a pinch-type whiskey bottle that never had any whiskey in it. Her voice is monotonous and unmusical. Her education was insufficient. Her family background is mediocre, she can't cook, and she doesn't brush her teeth often enough."

"My, my," said the cat, raising both paws in surprise. "I detect a ring of sincerity in all that. It pleases me. That is exactly the way I have felt for some years. I have never found fault with her cooking, though; she buys special food for me. I am tired of it. I am tired of her. I am tired of her to an almost unbelievable extent. Almost as much as I hate you."

"Me?"

"Of course. You're an imitation. You're a phony. Your birth is against you, Ransome. No animal that sweats and shaves, that opens doors for women, that dresses itself in equally phony imitations of the skins of animals, can achieve the status of a cat. You are presumptuous."

"You're not?"

"I am different. I *am* a cat, and have a right to do as I please. I disliked you so intensely when I saw you this evening that I made up my mind to kill you."

"Why didn't you? Why—don't you?"

"I couldn't," said the cat coolly. "Not when you sleep like a cat . . . No, I thought of something far more amusing."

"Oh?"

"Oh, yes." Fluffy stretched out a foreleg, extended his claws. Ransome noticed subconsciously how long and strong they seemed. The moon had gone its way, and the room was filling with slate-gray light.

"What woke you," said the cat, leaping to the window sill, "just before I came in?"

"I don't know," said Ransome. "Some little noise, I imagine."

"No, indeed," said Fluffy, curling his tail and grinning through his whiskers. "It was the *stopping* of a noise. Notice how quiet it is?"

It was, indeed. There wasn't a sound in the house—oh, yes, now he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

could hear the plodding footsteps of the maid on her way from the kitchen to Mrs. Benedetto's bedroom, and the soft clink of a teacup. But otherwise—suddenly he had it. "The old horse stopped snoring!"

"She did," said the cat.

The door across the hall opened, there was the murmur of the maid's voice, a loud crash, the most horrible scream Ransome had ever heard, pounding footsteps rushing down the hall, another scream, silence.

"What the—"

Ransome bounced out of bed.

"Just the maid," said Fluffy, washing between his toes, but keeping the corners of his eyes on Ransome. "She just found Mrs. Benedetto."

"Found—"

"Yes. I tore her throat out."

"Good God! Why?"

Fluffy poised himself on the window sill. "So you'd be blamed for it," he said, and laughing nastily, he leaped out and disappeared in the gray morning.

AGE DOES NOT DIM THE QUALITY OF

ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

BUT ISSUES NO LONGER CURRENT CAN BE DELIVERED TO YOU AT A DISCOUNT.

And not so very old, either. 1958 to 1962. At ten for a dollar they become an exciting mystery and suspense grab bag at grab bag prices. That divides down into 132 pages of the best writers in the field for a dime. So whoever said, caveat emptor certainly wasn't referring to this offer.

May we hear from you? A dollar along with the coupon below and we'll reply with ten (10) assorted back issues of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE in newsstand condition.

Until the supply is exhausted, of course. And that might happen any day,

So hurry—

ELLERY QUEEN'S HOUSEKEEPER
505 PARK AVENUE, NEW YORK 22, N. Y.

Yes . . . here's my $1.00. Send me the ten assorted back copies of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE.

Name_____ (Please Print)

Address_____

City_____ Zone____ State_____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HUGH PENTECOST**

TITLE: ***The Day the Children Vanished***

TYPE: Detective-Suspense Novelette

DETECTIVE: Clyde Haviland

LOCALE: New England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *One bright, clear winter's afternoon, between Clayton and Lakeview, a school bus with nine children and a driver disappeared from the face of the earth—vanished into thin air on a two-mile stretch of road where disappearance was utterly impossible!*

ON A BRIGHT, CLEAR WINTER'S AFTernoon the nine children in the town of Clayton who traveled each day to the Regional School in Lakeview disappeared from the face of the earth, along with the bus in which they traveled and its driver, as completely as if they had been sucked up into outer space by some monstrous interplanetary vacuum cleaner.

Actually, in the time of hysteria which followed the disappearance, this theory was put forward by some distraught citizen of Clayton, and not a few people, completely stumped for an explanation, gave consideration to it.

There was, of course, nothing interplanetary or supernatural about the disappearance of nine children, one adult, and a special-bodied station wagon which was used as a school bus. It was the result of callous human villainy. But, because there was no possible explanation for it, it assumed all the aspects of black magic in the minds of tortured parents and a bewildered citizenry.

Clayton is seven miles from Lakeview. Clayton is a rapidly growing quarry town. Lakeview, considerably larger and with a long history of planning for growth, recently built a new school. It was agreed

Copyright 1958 by United Newspapers Magazine Corporation

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

between the boards of education of the two towns that nine children living at the east end of Clayton should be sent to the Lakeview School where there was adequate space and teaching staff. It was to be just a temporary expedient.

Since there were only nine children, they did not send one of the big, forty-eight-passenger school buses to get them. A nine-passenger station wagon was acquired, properly painted and marked as a school bus, and Jerry Mahoney, a mechanic in the East Clayton Garage, was hired to make the two trips each day with the children.

Jerry Mahoney was well liked and respected. He had been a mechanic in the Air Force during his tour of duty in the armed services. He was a wizard with engines. He was engaged to be married to Elizabeth Deering, who worked in the Clayton Bank and was one of Clayton's choice picks. They were both nice people, responsible people.

The disappearance of the station wagon, the nine children, and Jerry Mahoney took place on a two-mile stretch of road where disappearance was impossible. It was called the "dugway," and it wound along the side of the lake. Heavy wire guardrails protected the road from the lake for the full two miles. There was not a gap in it anywhere.

The ground on the other side of the road rose abruptly upward into thousands of acres of mountain woodlands, so thickly grown that not even a tractor could have made its way up any part of it except for a few yards of deserted road that led to an abandoned quarry. Even over this old road nothing could have passed without leaving a trail of torn brush and broken saplings.

At the Lakeview end of the dugway was a filling station owned by old Jake Nugent. On the afternoon of the disappearance the bus, with Jerry Mahoney at the wheel and his carload of kids laughing and shouting at each other, stopped at old man Nugent's. Jerry Mahoney had brought the old man a special delivery letter from the post office, thus saving the RFD driver from making a special trip. Jerry and old Jake exchanged greetings, the old man signed the receipt for his letter —which was from his son in Chicago asking for a loan of fifty dollars—and Jerry drove off into the dugway with his cargo of kids.

At the Clayton end of the dugway was Joe Gorman's Diner, and one of the children in Jerry's bus was Peter Gorman, Joe's son. The Diner was Jerry's first stop coming out of the dugway.

It was four-thirty in the afternoon when Joe Gorman realized that the bus was nearly three-quarters of an hour late. Worried, he called the school in Lakeview and was told by Miss Bromfield, the principal, that the bus had left on schedule.

"He may have had a flat, or something," Miss Bromfield suggested.

This was one of seven calls Miss

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bromfield was to get in the next half hour, all inquiring about the bus. Nine children; seven families.

Joe Gorman was the first to do anything about it seriously. He called Jake Nugent's filling station to ask about the bus, and old Jake told him it had gone through from his place on schedule. So something had happened to Jerry and his bus load of kids in the dugway. Joe got out his jeep and headed through the dugway toward Lakeview. He got all the way to Jake Nugent's without seeing the bus or passing anyone coming the other way.

Jake Nugent was a shrewd old gent, in complete possession of all his faculties. He didn't drink. When he said he had seen the bus—that it had stopped to deliver his letter—and that he had watched it drive off into the dugway, you had to believe it. Cold sweat broke out on Joe Gorman's face as he listened. The dugway had a tendency to be icy. He had noticed coming over that it hadn't been sanded. Joe hadn't been looking for a major tragedy. But if the bus had skidded, gone through the guard-rail . . .

He used Jake's phone to call the Dicklers in Clayton. The Dicklers' two children, Dorothy and Donald, were part of Jerry's load and they were the next stop after Joe's Diner. The Dicklers were already alarmed because their children hadn't come home.

Joe didn't offer any theories. He was scared, though. He called the trooper barracks in Lakeview and told them about the missing bus. They didn't take it too seriously, but said they'd send a man out.

Joe headed back for Clayton. This time his heart was a lump in his throat. He drove slowly, staring at every inch of the wire guard-rails. There was not a break anywhere, not a broken or bent post. The bus simply couldn't have skidded over the embankment into the lake without smashing through the wire guard-rail.

Joe Gorman felt better when he came out at his diner at the Clayton end. He felt better, but he felt dizzy. Five minutes later Trooper Teliski came whizzing through from Lakeview and stopped his car.

"What's the gag?" he asked Joe.

Joe tried to light a cigarette and his hands were shaking so badly he couldn't make it. Teliski snapped on his lighter and held it out. Joe dragged smoke deep into his lungs.

"Look," he said. "The bus started through the dugway at the regular time." He told about Jerry's stop at Nugent's. "It never came out this end."

A nerve twitched in Teliski's cheek. "The lake," he said.

Joe shook his head. "I—I thought of that, right off. I just came through ahead of you—looking. Not a break in the guard-rail anywhere. Not a scratch. Not a bent post. The bus didn't go into the lake. I'll stake my life on that."

"Then what else?" Teliski asked.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It couldn't go up the mountain."

"I know," Joe said, and the two men stared at each other.

"It's some kind of a joke," Teliski said.

"What kind of a joke? It's no joke to me—or the Dicklers. I talked to them."

"Maybe they had permission to go to a special movie or something," Teliski said.

"Without notifying the parents? Miss Bromfield would have told me, anyway. I talked to her. Listen, Teliski. The bus went into the dugway and it didn't come out. It's not in the dugway now, and it didn't go into the lake."

Teliski was silent for a moment, and then he spoke with a solid attempt at common sense. "It didn't come out this end," he said. "We'll check back on that guard-rail, but let's say you're right. It didn't skid into the lake. It couldn't go up the mountain. So where does that leave us?"

"Going nuts!" Joe said.

"It leaves us with only one answer. The station wagon never went into the dugway."

Joe Gorman nodded. "That's logic," he said. "But why would Jake Nugent lie? Jerry's an hour and three-quarters late now. If he didn't go in the dugway, where is he? Where *could* he go? Why hasn't he telephoned if everything is okay?"

A car drove up and stopped. A man got out and came running toward them. It was Karl Dickler, father of two of the missing children. "Thank God you're here, Teliski. What's happened?"

"Some kind of a gag," Teliski said. "We can't figure it out. The bus never came through the dugway."

"But it did!" Karl Dickler said.

"It never came out this end," Joe Gorman said. "I was watching for Pete, naturally."

"But it did come through!" Dickler said. "I passed them myself on the way to Lakeview. They were about half a mile this way from Jake Nugent's. I saw them! I waved at my own kids!"

The three men stared at each other.

"It never came out this end," Joe Gorman said, in a choked voice.

Dickler swayed and reached out to the trooper to steady himself. "The lake!" he whispered.

But they were not in the lake. Joe Gorman's survey proved accurate; no broken wire, no bent post, not even a scratch . . .

It was nearly dark when the real search began. Troopers, the families of the children, the selectmen, the sheriff and twenty-five or thirty volunteer deputies, a hundred or more school friends of the missing children.

The lake was definitely out. Not only was the guard-rail intact, but the lake was frozen over with about an inch of ice. There wasn't a break in the smooth surface of the ice any-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where along the two miles of shore bordering the dugway.

Men and women and children swarmed through the woods on the other side of the road, knowing all the time it was useless. The road was called the "dugway" because it had been dug out of the side of the mountain. There was a gravel bank about seven feet high running almost unbrokenly along that side of the road. There was the one old abandoned trail leading to the quarry. It was clear, after walking the first ten yards of it, that no car had come that way. It couldn't.

A hundred phone calls were made to surrounding towns and villages. No one had seen the station wagon, the children, or Jerry Mahoney. The impossible had to be faced.

The bus had gone into the dugway and it hadn't come out. It hadn't skidded into the lake and it hadn't climbed the impenetrable brush of the mountain. It was just gone! Vanished into thin air!

Everyone was deeply concerned for and sympathetic with the Dicklers, and Joe Gorman, and the Williams, the Trents, the Ishams, the Nortons, and the Jennings, parents of the missing children. Nobody thought much about Jerry Mahoney's family, or his girl.

It wasn't reasonable, but as the evening wore on and not one speck of evidence was found or one acceptable theory advanced, people began to talk about Jerry Mahoney. He was the driver. The bus had to have been driven somewhere. It couldn't navigate without Jerry Mahoney at the wheel. Jerry was the only adult involved. However it had been worked—this disappearance—Jerry must have had a hand in it.

It didn't matter that, until an hour ago, Jerry had been respected, trusted, liked. Their children were gone and Jerry had taken them somewhere. Why? Ransom. They would all get ransom letters in the morning, they said. A mass kidnaping. Jerry had the kids somewhere. There weren't any rich kids in Clayton, so he was going to demand ransom from all seven families.

Thus Jerry Mahoney became a villain because there was no one else to suspect. Nobody stopped to think that Jerry's father and Jerry's girl might be as anxious about his absence as the others were about the missing children.

At nine thirty Sergeant Mason and Trooper Teliski of the State Police, George Peabody, the sheriff, and a dozen men of the community including Joe Gorman and Karl Dickler stormed into the living room of Jerry Mahoney's house where an old man with silvery white hair sat in an overstuffed armchair. Elizabeth Deering, Jerry's fiancée, was huddled on the floor beside him, her face buried on his knees, weeping.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The old man wore a rather sharply cut gray flannel suit, a bright scarlet vest with brass buttons, and a green necktie that must have been designed for a St. Patrick's Day parade. As he stroked the girl's blonde hair, the light from the lamp reflected glittering shafts from a square-cut diamond in a heavy gold setting he wore on his little finger. He looked up at Sergeant Mason and his small army of followers, and his blue eyes stopped twinkling as he saw the stern look on the Sergeant's face.

"All right, Pat," Sergeant Mason said. "What's Jerry done with those kids?" Pat Mahoney's pale-blue eyes met the Sergeant's stare steadily. Then crinkles of mirth appeared at the corners of his eyes and mouth.

"I'd like to ask you something before I try to answer that," Pat Mahoney said.

"Well?"

"Have you stopped beating your wife, Sergeant?" Pat Mahoney asked. His cackle of laughter was the only sound in the room . . .

There are those who are old enough to remember the days when Mahoney and Faye were listed about fourth on a bill of eight star acts all around the Keith-Orpheum vaudeville circuit. Pat Mahoney was an Irish comic with dancing feet, and Nora Faye—Mrs. Mahoney to you—could match him at dancing and had the soprano voice of an angel.

Like so many people in show business, Pat was a blusterer, a boaster, a name dropper, but with it all a solid professional who would practice for hours a day to perfect a new routine, never missed an entrance in forty years, and up to the day young Jerry was born in a cheap hotel in Grand Rapids, Michigan, had given away half what he earned to dead beats and hopeless failures.

The diamond ring he wore today had been in and out of a hundred hock shops. It had been the basis of his and Nora's security for more years than he liked to remember.

If you were left alone with Pat for more than five minutes, he went back to the old days—to the people he had idolized, like Sophie Tucker, and Smith and Dale, and Williams and Wolfus, and Joe Jackson. He'd known them all, played on the same bills with them. "But," he would tell you, and a strange radiance would come into the pale-blue eyes, "the greatest of them all was Nora Faye—Mrs. Mahoney to you."

Once he was started on his Nora, there was no way of stopping Pat Mahoney. He told of her talents as a singer and dancer, but in the end it was a saga of endless patience, of kindness and understanding, of love for a fat-headed, vain little Irish comic, of tenderness as a mother, and finally of clear-eyed courage in the face of stark tragedy.

Mahoney and Faye had never played the Palace, the Broadway goal of all vaudevillians. Pat had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

worked on a dozen acts that would crack the ice and finally he'd made it.

"We'd come out in cowboy suits, all covered with jewels, and jeweled guns, and jeweled boots, and we'd do a little soft shoe routine, and then suddenly all the lights would go out and only the jewels would show—they were made special for that—and we'd go into a fast routine, pulling the guns, and twirling and juggling them, and the roof would fall in! Oh, we tried it out of town, and our agent finally got us the booking at the Palace we'd always dreamed of."

There'd be a long silence then, and Pat would take a gaudy handkerchief from his hip pocket and blow his nose with a kind of angry violence. "I can show you the costumes still. They're packed away in a trunk in the attic. Just the way we wore them—me and Nora—the last time we ever played. Atlantic City, it was. And she came off after the act with the cheers still ringing in our ears, and down she went on the floor of the dressing room, writhing in pain.

"Then she told me. It had been getting worse for months. She didn't want me to know. The doctor had told her straight out. She'd only a few months she could count on. She'd never said a word to me—working toward the Palace—knowing I'd dreamed of it. And only three weeks after that—she left us. Me and Jerry—she left us. We were standing by her bed when she left—and the last words she spoke were to Jerry. 'Take care of Pat,' she says to him. 'He'll be helpless without someone to take care of him.' And then she smiled at me, and all the years were in that smile."

And then, wherever he happened to be when he told the story, Pat Mahoney would wipe the back of his hand across his eyes and say, "If you'll excuse me, I think I'll be going home." . . .

Nobody laughed when Pat pulled the old courtroom wheeze on Sergeant Mason about "have you stopped beating your wife." Pat looked past the Sergeant at Trooper Teliski, and Joe Gorman, and Karl Dickler, and Mr. and Mrs. Jennings, whose two daughters were in the missing bus, and George Peabody, the fat, wheezing sheriff.

"The question I asked you, Sergeant," he said, "makes just as much sense as the one you asked me. You asked me what Nora's boy has done with those kids? There's no answer to that question. Do I hear you saying, 'I know what you must be feeling, Pat Mahoney, and you, Elizabeth Deering? And is there anything we can do for you in this hour of your terrible anxiety.' I don't hear you saying that, Sergeant."

"I'm sorry, Pat," Mason said. "Those kids are missing. Jerry had to take them somewhere."

"No!" Liz Deering cried. "You

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all know Jerry better than that!"

They didn't, it seemed, but they could be forgiven. You can't confront people with the inexplicable without frightening them and throwing them off balance. You can't endanger their children and expect a sane reaction. They muttered angrily, and old Pat saw the tortured faces of Joe Gorman and Karl Dickler and the swollen red eyes of Mrs. Jennings.

"Has he talked in any way queerly to you, Pat?" Mason asked. "Has he acted normal of late?"

"Nora's boy is the most normal boy you ever met," Pat Mahoney said. "You know that, Sergeant. Why, you've known him since he was a child."

Mrs. Jennings screamed out, "He'd protect his son. Naturally he'd protect his son. But he's stolen our children!"

"The Pied Piper rides again," Pat Mahoney said.

"Make him talk!" Mrs. Jennings cried, and the crowd around her muttered louder.

"When did you last see Jerry, Pat?"

"Breakfast," Pat said. "He has his lunch at Joe Gorman's Diner." The corner of his mouth twitched. "He should have been home for dinner long ago."

"Did he have a need for money?" Mason asked.

"Money? He was a man respected —until now—wasn't he? He was a man with a fine girl in love with him, wasn't he? What need would he have for money?"

"Make him answer sensibly!" Mrs. Jennings pleaded in a despairing voice.

Joe Gorman stepped forward. "Pat, maybe Jerry got sick all of a sudden. It's happened to men who saw action overseas. Maybe you saw signs of something and wouldn't want to tell of it. But my Pete was on that bus, and Karl's two, and Mrs. Jennings' two. We're nowhere, Pat—so if you can tell us anything! Our kids were on that bus!"

Pat Mahoney's eyes, as he listened to Joe Gorman, filled with pain. "My kid is on that bus, too, Joe," he said.

They all stared at him, some with hatred. And then, in the distance, they heard the wail of a siren. The troopers' car was coming from Lakeview, hell-bent.

"Maybe it's news!" someone shouted.

And they all went stumbling out of the house to meet the approaching car—all but Elizabeth Deering, who stayed behind, clinging to the old man.

"I don't understand it," she said, her voice shaken. "They think he's harmed their children, Pat! Why? Why would they think he'd do such a thing? Why?"

Old Pat's eyes had a faraway look in them. "Did I ever tell you about The Great Thurston?" he asked. "Greatest magic act I ever saw."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Pat!" Elizabeth said, her eyes widening in horror.

"First time I ever caught his act was in Sioux City," Pat said. "He came out in a flowing cape, and a silk hat, and he . . ."

Dear God, he's losing his reason, Elizabeth Deering told herself. Let the news be good! Let them be found safe!

The police car with its wailing siren carried news, but it was not the sort the people of Clayton were hoping to hear.

It was reassuring to know that within a few hours of the tragedy the entire area was alerted, that the moment daylight came a fleet of army helicopters would cover the area for hundreds of miles around, that a five-state alarm was out for the missing station wagon and its passengers, and that the Attorney General had sent the best man on his staff to direct and coordinate the search.

Top officials, viewing the case coldly and untouched by the hysteria of personal involvement, had a theory. Of course there had to be a rational explanation of the disappearance of the bus, and Clyde Haviland, tall, stoop-shouldered, scholarly-looking investigator from the Attorney General's office, was ordered to produce that explanation as soon as possible upon his arrival in Clayton. But beyond that, officials had no doubt as to the reason for the disappearance: this was a mass kidnaping—something novel in the annals of crime.

Since none of the families involved had means, Haviland and his superiors were convinced the next move in this strange charade would be a demand on the whole community to pay ransom for the children. The F.B.I. was alerted to be ready to act the moment there was any indication of involvement across state lines.

While mothers wept and the menfolk grumbled angrily that Jerry Mahoney, the driver, was at the bottom of this, officialdom worked calmly and efficiently. The Air Force turned over its complete data on Technical Sergeant Jerry Mahoney to the F.B.I. Men who had known Jerry in the service were wakened from their sleep or pulled out of restaurants or theatres to be qustioned. Had he ever said anything that would indicate he might move into a world of violence? Did his medical history contain any record of mental illness?

Sitting at a desk in the town hall, Clyde Haviland reported on some of this to George Peabody, the sheriff, the town's three selectmen, Sergeant Mason, and a couple of other troopers. Haviland, carefully polishing his shell-rimmed glasses, was a quiet, reassuring sort of man. He had a fine reputation in the state. He was not an unfamiliar figure to people in Clayton because he had solved a particularly brutal murder in the neighboring town of Johns-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ville, and his investigation had brought him in and out of Clayton for several weeks.

"So far," he said, with a faint smile, "The report on Jerry Mahoney is quite extraordinary."

"In what way?" Sergeant Mason asked, eager for the scent of blood.

"Model citizen," Haviland said. "No one has a bad word for him. No bad temper. Never held grudges. Never chiseled. Saves his money. His savings account in the Clayton bank would surprise some of you. On the face of it, he's the last person in the world to suspect."

"There has to be a first time for everything," Karl Dickler said. He was a selectman as well as one of the bereaved parents.

"It's going down toward zero tonight," George Peabody, the sheriff, said glumly. "If those kids are out anywhere—"

"They're one hell of a long way from here by now, if you ask me," Sergeant Mason said.

Haviland looked at him, his eyes unblinking behind the lenses of his glasses. "Except that they never came out of the dugway."

"Nobody saw them," Mason said. "But they're not there so they did come out."

"They didn't come out," Joe Gorman said. "I was watching for them from the window of my diner."

"There were the three seconds you were getting something out of the icebox in your pantry," Mason said.

"And I suppose everyone else along Main Street had his head in a closet at just that time!" Joe Gorman said.

"Or someone reached down out of the heavens and snatched that station wagon up into space," Haviland said. He was looking at Peabody's pudgy face as he spoke, and something he saw there made him add quickly, "I'm kidding, of course."

Peabody laughed nervously. "It's the only explanation we've had so far."

Karl Dickler put his hand up to his cheek. There was a nerve there that had started to twitch, regularly as the tick of a clock. "I like Jerry. I'd give the same kind of report on him you've been getting, Mr. Haviland. But you can't pass up the facts. I'd have said he'd defend those kids with his life. But did he? And the old man—his father. He won't answer questions directly. There's something queer about him. Damn it, Mr. Haviland, my kids are—out there, somewhere!" He waved toward the frost-coated window panes.

"Every highway within two hundred miles of here is being patrolled, Mr. Dickler," Haviland said. "If they'd driven straight away from here in daylight—granting Mason is right and everybody was in a closet when the station wagon went through town—they'd have been seen a hundred times after they left Clayton. There isn't one report of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

anyone having seen the station wagon with the school-bus markings." Haviland paused to light a cigarette. His tapering fingers were nicotine-stained.

"If you'd ever investigated a crime, Mr. Dickler, you'd know we usually are swamped with calls from people who think they've seen the wanted man. A bus—a bus load of kids. Somebody *had* to see it! But there isn't even a crackpot report. If there was some place he could have stayed under cover—and don't tell me, I know there isn't—and started moving after dark, he might get some distance. But alarms are out everywhere. He couldn't travel five miles now without being trapped."

"We've told ourselves all these things for hours!" Dickler said, pinching savagely at his twitching cheek. "What are you going to *do,* Haviland?"

"Unless we're all wrong," Haviland said, "we're going to hear from the kidnapers soon. Tonight—or maybe in the morning—by mail, or phone, or in some unexpected way. But we'll hear. They'll demand money What other purpose can there be? Once we hear, we'll have to start to play it by ear. That's the way these cases are."

"Meanwhile you just sit here and wait!" Dickler said, a kind of despair rising in his voice. "What am I going to say to my wife?"

"I think all the parents of the children should go home. You may be the one the kidnapers contact. It may be your child they put on the phone to convince you the kids are safe," Haviland said. "As soon as it's daylight—"

"You think the kids *are* safe?" Dickler cried out.

Haviland stared at the distraught father for a minute. Then he spoke, gently. "What kind of assurance could I give you, Mr. Dickler? Even if I tried, you wouldn't believe me. People who play this kind of game are without feelings, not rational. When you fight them, you have to walk quietly. If you scare them, God knows what to expect. That's why I urge you all to go home and wait." He dropped his cigarette on the floor and heeled it out. "And pray," he said. . . .

Elizabeth Deering, Jerry Mahoey's girl, was sick with anxiety. Jerry was foremost in her mind; Jerry, missing with the children; Jerry, worse than that, suspected by his friends. But on top of that was old Pat Mahoney.

He hadn't made the slightest sense since the angry crowd had left his house. He had talked on endlessly about the old days in vaudeville. He seemed obsessed with the memory of the first time he had seen The Great Thurston in Sioux City. He remembered card tricks, and sawing the lady in half, and his wife Nora's childish delight in being completely bewildered. He seemed to remember everything he had seen the man do.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Elizabeth tried, but she could not bring Pat back to the present. The tragedy seemed to have tipped him right out of the world of reason. She was partly relieved when she heard firm steps on the front porch. The other part of her, when she saw Sergeant Mason and the tall stranger, was the fear that they had news—bad news about Jerry.

Mason was less aggressive than he had been on his first visit. He introduced Haviland and said they wanted to talk to Pat. Elizabeth took them back into the living room where old Pat still sat in the overstuffed armchair.

Mason introduced Haviland. "Mr. Haviland is a special investigator from the Attorney General's office, Pat."

Pat's eyes brightened. "Say, you're the fellow that solved that murder over in Johnsville, aren't you?" he said. "Smart piece of work."

"Thanks," Haviland said. He looked at Pat, astonished at his gaudy vest and tie and the glittering diamond on his finger. He had been prepared for Pat, but not adequately.

"Sit down," Pat said. "Maybe Liz would make us some coffee if we asked her pretty."

Mason nodded to Liz, who went out into the kitchen. He followed her to tell her there was no news. Haviland sat down on the couch next to Pat, stretched out his long legs, and offered Pat a cigarette.

"Don't smoke," Pat said. "Never really liked anything but cigars. Nora hated the smell of 'em. So what was I to do? You go to vaudeville in the old days, Mr. Haviland?"

"When I was a kid," Haviland said, lighting a cigarette. "I never had the pleasure of seeing you, though, Mr. Mahoney."

"Call me Pat," Pat said. "Everyone does. I was nothing, Mr. Haviland. Just a third-rate song-and-dance man. But Nora—well, if you ever saw my Nora . . ."

Haviland waited for him to go on, but Pat seemed lost in his precious memories.

"You must be very worried about your son, Pat," he said.

For a fractional moment the mask of pleasant incompetence seemed to be stripped from Pat's face. "Wouldn't you be?" he asked, harshly. Then, almost instantly, the mask was fitted back into place, and old Pat gave his cackling laugh. "You got theories, Mr. Haviland? How're you going to handle this case?"

"I think," Haviland said conversationally, "that the children and your son have been kidnaped. I think we'll hear from the kidnapers soon. I think, in all probability, the whole town will be asked to get up a large ransom."

Pat nodded. "I'll chip in this diamond ring," he said. "It's got Jerry out of trouble more than once."

Haviland's eyes narrowed. "He's been in trouble before?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"His main trouble was his Pop," Pat said. "Sometimes there wasn't enough to eat. But we could always raise eating money on this ring." He turned his bright, laughing eyes directly on Haviland. "You figured out how the bus disappeared?"

"No," Haviland said.

"Of course it doesn't really matter, does it?" Pat said.

"Well, if we knew—" Haviland said.

"It wouldn't really matter," Pat said. "It's what's going to happen now that matters."

"You mean the demand for money?"

"If that's what's going to happen," Pat said. The cackling laugh suddenly grated on Haviland's nerves. The old joker did know something!

"You have a different theory, Pat?" Haviland asked, keeping his exasperation out of his voice.

"You ever see The Great Thurston on the Keith-Orpheum circuit?" Pat asked.

"I'm afraid not," Haviland said.

"Greatest magic act I ever saw," Pat said. "Better than Houdini. Better than anyone. I first saw him in Sioux City—"

"About the case here, Pat," Haviland interrupted. "You have a theory?"

"I got no theory," Pat said. "But I know what's going to happen."

Haviland leaned forward. "What's going to happen?"

"One of two things," Pat said. "Everybody in this town is going to be looking. They're going to be looking for that station wagon in the lake, where they know it isn't, and they're going to be looking for it in the woods, where they know it isn't. That's one thing that may happen. The other thing is, they buy this theory of yours, Mr. Haviland—and it's a good theory, mind you—and they all stay home and wait to hear something. There's one same result from both things, isn't there?"

"Same result?"

"Sure. Nobody in Clayton goes to work. The quarries don't operate. The small businesses will shut down. People will be looking and people will be waiting . . ."

"So?"

"So what good will that do anyone?" Pat asked.

Haviland ground out his cigarette in an ashtray. "It won't do anyone any good. The quarry owners will lose some money. The small businesses will lose some."

"Not much point in it, is there?" Pat said, grinning.

Haviland rose. He'd had about enough. Mason and Elizabeth were coming back from the kitchen with coffee. "There isn't much point to anything you're saying, Mr. Mahoney."

Pat's eyes twinkled. "You said you never saw The Great Thurston, didn't you?"

"I never saw him," Haviland said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, we'll see. If they're supposed to stay home and wait, they'll stay home and wait. If they're supposed to be out searching, they'll be out searching. Ah, coffee! Smells real good. Pull up a chair, Sergeant. By the way, Mr. Haviland, I'll make you a bet," Pat said.

"I'm not a betting man," Haviland said.

"Oh, just a manner-of-speaking bet," Pat said. "I'll make you a bet that tomorrow morning they'll be out searching. I'll make you a bet that *even if you order them to stay home and wait,* they'll be out searching!"

"Look here, Pat, if you know something . . ."

A dreamy look came into Pat's eyes. "Nora was so taken with The Great Thurston that time in Sioux City I went around to see him afterwards. I thought maybe he'd show me how to do a few simple tricks. I pretended it was for Nora, but really I thought we might use 'em in our act. He wouldn't tell me anything—that is, not about any of his tricks. But he told me the whole principle of his business."

"Sugar?" Elizabeth asked Haviland. Poor old man, she thought.

"The principle is," Pat said, "to make your audience think only what you want them to think, and see only what you want them to see." Pat's eyes brightened. "Which reminds me, there's something I'd like to have you see, Mr. Haviland."

Haviland gulped his coffee. Somehow he felt mesmerized by the old man. Pat was at the foot of the stairs, beckoning. Haviland followed.

Elizabeth looked at Mason and there were tears in her eyes. "It's thrown him completely off base," she said. "You know what he's going to show Mr. Haviland?" Sergeant Mason shook his head.

"A coyboy suit!" Elizabeth said, and dropped down on the couch, crying softly. "He's going to show him a cowboy suit."

And she was right. Haviland found himself in the attic, his head bowed to keep from bumping into the sloping beams. Old Pat had opened a wardrobe trunk and with the gesture of a waiter taking the silver lid off a tomato surprise, revealed two cowboy suits, one hanging neatly on each side of the trunk —Nora's and his. Chaps, shirt, vest, boots, Stetsons, and gun belt—all studded with stage jewelry.

". . . and when the lights went out," Pat was saying, "all you could see was these gewgaws, sparkling. And we'd take out the guns . . ." And suddenly Pat had the two jeweled six-shooters in his hands, twirling and spinning them. "In the old days I could draw these guns and twirl 'em into position faster than Jesse James!"

The spell was broken for Haviland. The old guy was cuckoo. "I enjoyed seeing them, Mr. Mahoney," he said. "But now, I'm afraid I've got to get back . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As soon as dawn broke, Haviland had Sergeant Mason and Sheriff George Peabody take him out to the scene of the disappearance. Everyone else was at home, waiting to hear from the kidnapers. It had been a terrible night for the whole town, a night filled with forebodings and dark imaginings. Haviland covered every inch of the two-mile stretch of the dugway. And he couldn't get away from the facts. There was no way for it to have happened—but it had happened.

About eight thirty he was back in Clayton in Joe's Diner, stamping his feet to warm them and waiting eagerly for eggs and toast to go with his steaming cup of black coffee. All the parents had been checked. There'd been no phone calls, no notes slipped under doors, nothing in the early-morning mail.

Haviland never got his breakfast. Trooper Teliski came charging into the diner just as Joe Gorman was taking the eggs off the grill. Teliski, a healthy young man, was white as parchment, and the words came out of him in a kind of choking sob. "We've found 'em," he said. "Or at least we know where they are. Helicopters spotted 'em. I just finished passing the word in town."

Joe Gorman dropped the plate of eggs on the floor behind the counter. Haviland spun around on his counter stool. Just looking at Teliski made the hair rise on the back of his neck.

"The old quarry off the dugway," Teliski said, and gulped for air. "No sign of the bus. It didn't drive up there. But the kids." Teliski steadied himself on the counter. "Schoolbooks," he said. "A couple of coats—lying on the edge of the quarry. And in the quarry—more of the same. A red beret belonging to one of the kids—"

"Peter!" Joe Gorman cried out.

Haviland headed for the door. The main street of Clayton was frightening to see. People were running out of houses, screaming at each other, heading crazily toward the dugway. Those who went for their cars scattered the people in front of them. There was no order—only blind panic.

Haviland stood on the curb outside the diner, ice in his veins. He looked down the street to where old Pat Mahoney lived, just in time to see a wildly weeping woman pick up a stone and throw it through the front window of Pat's house.

"Come on—what's the matter with you?" Teliski shouted from behind the wheel of the State Police car.

Haviland stood where he was, frozen, staring at the broken window of Pat Mahoney's house. The abandoned quarry, he knew, was sixty feet deep, full to within six feet of the top with icy water fed in by constantly bubbling springs.

A fire engine roared past. They were going to try to pump out the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

quarry. It would be like bailing out the Atlantic Ocean with a tea cup.

"Haviland!" Teliski called desperately.

Haviland still stared at Pat Mahoney's house. A cackling old voice rang in his ears. "I'll make you a bet, Mr. Haviland. I'll make you a bet that even if you order them to stay at home and wait, they'll be out searching."

Rage such as he had never known flooded the ice out of Haviland's veins. So Pat had known! The old codger had known *last night!*

Special Investigator Haviland had never witnessed anything like the scene at the quarry.

The old road, long since overgrown, which ran about 200 yards in from the dugway to the quarry, had been trampled down as if by a herd of buffalo.

Within three-quarters of an hour of the news reaching town, it seemed as if everyone from Clayton and half the population of Lakeview had arrived at the quarry's edge.

One of the very first army helicopters, which had taken to the air at dawn, had spotted the clothes and books at the edge of the abandoned stone pit.

The pilot had dropped down close enough to identify the strange objects and radioed immediately to State Police. The stampede had followed.

Haviland was trained to be objective in the face of tragedy, but he found himself torn to pieces by what he saw. Women crowded forward, screaming, trying to examine the articles of clothing and the books. Maybe not all the children were in this icy grave. It was only the hope of desperation. No one really believed it. It seemed, as Trooper Teliski had said, to be the work of a maniac.

Haviland collected as many facts about the quarry as he could from a shaken Sheriff Peabody.

"Marble's always been Clayton's business," Peabody said. "Half the big buildings in New York have got their marble out of Clayton quarries. This was one of the first quarries opened up by the Clayton Marble Company nearly sixty years ago. When they started up new ones, this one was abandoned."

In spite of the cold, Peabody was sweating. He wiped the sleeve of his plaid hunting shirt across his face. "Sixty feet down, and sheer walls," he said. "They took the blocks out at ten-foot levels, so there is a little ledge about every ten feet going down. A kid couldn't climb out of it if it was empty."

Haviland glanced over at the fire engine which had started to pump water from the quarry. "Not much use in that," he said.

"The springs are feeding it faster than they can pump it out," Peabody said. "There's no use telling them. They got to feel they're doing something." The fat sheriff's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mouth set in a grim slit. "Why would Jerry Mahoney do a thing like this? *Why?* I guess you can only say the old man is a little crazy, and the son has gone off his rocker too."

"There are some things that don't fit," Haviland said. He noticed his own hands weren't steady as he lit a cigarette. The hysterical shrieking of one of the women near the edge of the quarry grated on his nerves. "Where is the station wagon?"

"He must have driven up here and—and done what he did to the kids," Peabody said. "Then waited till after dark to make a getaway."

"But you searched this part of the woods before dark last night," Haviland said.

"We missed it somehow, that's all," Peabody said stubbornly.

"A nine-passenger station wagon is pretty hard to miss," Haviland said.

"So we missed it," Peabody said. "God knows how, but we missed it." He shook his head. "I suppose the only thing that'll work here is grappling hooks. They're sending a crane over from one of the active quarries. Take an hour or more to get it here. Nobody'll leave here till the hooks have scraped the bottom of that place and they've brought up the kids."

Unless, Haviland thought to himself, the lynching spirit gets into them. He was thinking of an old man in a red vest and a green necktie and a diamond twinkling on his little finger. He was thinking of a broken window pane—and of the way he'd seen mobs act before in his time.

Someone gripped the sleeve of Haviland's coat and he looked down into the horror-struck face of Elizabeth Deering, Jerry Mahoney's girl.

"It's true, then," she whispered. She swayed on her feet, holding tight to Haviland for support.

"It's true they found some things *belonging* to the kids," he said. "That's all that's true at the moment, Miss Deering." He was a little astonished by his own words. He realized that, instinctively, he was not believing everything that he saw in front of him. "This whole area was searched last night before dark," he said. "No one found any schoolbooks or coats or berets then. No one saw the station wagon."

"What's the use of talking that way?" Peabody said. His eyes were narrowed, staring at Liz Deering. "I don't want to believe what I see either, Mr. Haviland. But I got to." The next words came out of the fat man with a bitterness that stung like a whiplash. "Maybe you're the only one in Clayton that's lucky, Liz. You found out he was a homicidal maniac in time—before you got married to him."

"Please, George!" the girl cried. "How can you believe—"

"What can anyone believe but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that?" Peabody said, and turned away.

Liz Deering clung to Haviland, sobbing. The tall man stared over her head at the hundreds of people grouped around the quarry's edge. He was reminded of a mine disaster he had seen once in Pennsylvania: a whole town waiting at the head of the mine shaft for the dead to be brought to the surface.

"Let's get out of here," he said to Liz Deering, with sudden energy.

Clayton was a dead town. Stores were closed. Joe's Diner was closed. The railroad station agent was on the job, handling dozens of telegrams that were coming in from friends and relatives of the parents of the missing children. The two girls in the telephone office, across the street from the bank, were at their posts.

Old Mr. Granger, a teller in the bank, and one of the stenographers were all of the bank staff that had stayed on the job. Old Mr. Granger was preparing the payroll for the Clayton Marble Company. He didn't know whether the truck from the company's offices with the two guards would show up for the money or not.

Nothing else was working on schedule today. Even the hotel down the street had closed. One or two salesmen had driven into town, heard the news, and gone off down the dugway toward the scene of the tragedy. A few very old people tottered in and out the front doors of houses, looking anxiously down Main Street toward the dugway. Even the clinic was closed. The town's doctors and nurses had all gone to the scene of the disaster.

Down the street a piece of newspaper had been taped over the hole in Pat Mahoney's front window. Pat Mahoney sat in the big overstuffed armchair in his living room. He rocked slowly back and forth, staring at an open scrapbook spread across his knees. A big black headline from a show-business paper was pasted across the top.

MAHONEY AND FAYE
BOFFO BUFFALO

Under it were pictures of Pat and Nora in their jeweled cowboy suits, their six-shooters drawn, pointing straight at the camera. There was a description of the act, the dance in the dark with only the jewels showing and the six-shooters spouting flame. "Most original number of its kind seen in years," a Buffalo critic had written. "The ever popular Mahoney and Faye have added something to their familiar routines that should please theater audiences from coast to coast. We are not surprised to hear that they have been booked into the Palace."

Pat closed the scrapbook and put it down on the floor beside him. From the inside pocket of his jacket he took a wallet. It bulged with papers and cards. He was an honorary Elk, honorary police chief of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Wichita in 1927, a Friar, a Lamb.

Carefully protected by isinglass were some snapshots. They were faded now, but anyone could see they were pictures of Nora with little Jerry at various stages of his growth. There was Jerry at six months, Jerry at a year, Jerry at four years. And Nora, smiling gently at her son. The love seemed to shine right out of the pictures, Pat thought.

Pat replaced the pictures and put the wallet back in his pocket. He got up from his chair and moved toward the stairway. People who knew him would have been surprised. No one had ever seen Pat when his movements weren't brisk and youthful. He could still go into a tap routine at the drop of a hat, and he always gave the impression that he was on the verge of doing so. Now he moved slowly, almost painfully—a tired old man, with no need to hide it from anyone. There was no one to hide it from; Jerry was missing, Liz was gone.

He climbed to the second floor and turned to the attic door. He opened it, switched on the lights, and climbed up to the area under the eaves. There he opened the wardrobe trunk he'd shown to Haviland. From the left side he took out the cowboy outfit—the chaps, the boots, the vest and shirt and Stetson hat, and the gun belt with the two jeweled six-shooters. Slowly he carried them down to his bedroom on the second floor. There Pat Mahoney proceeded to get into costume.

He stood, at last, in front of the full-length mirror on the back of the bathroom door. The high-heeled boots made him a couple of inches taller than usual. The Stetson was set on his head at a rakish angle. The jeweled chaps and vest glittered in the sunlight from the window. Suddenly old Pat jumped into a flat-footed stance, and the guns were out of the holsters, spinning dizzily and then pointed straight at the mirror.

"Get 'em up, you lily-livered rats!" old Pat shouted. A bejeweled gunman stared back at him fiercely from the mirror.

Then, slowly, he turned away to a silver picture frame on his bureau. Nora, as a very young girl, looked out at him with her gentle smile.

"It'll be all right, honey," Pat said. "You'll see. It'll be another boffo, honey. Don't you worry about your boy. Don't you ever worry about him while I'm around."

It was a terrible day for Clayton, but Gertrude Naylor, the chief operator in the telephone office, said afterward that perhaps the worst moment for her was when she spotted old Pat Mahoney walking down the main street—right in the middle of the street—dressed in that crazy cowboy outfit. He walked slowly, looking from right to left, staying right on the white line that divided the street.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'd seen it a hundred times before in the movies," Gertrude Naylor said afterward. "A cowboy, walking down the street of a deserted town, waiting for his enemy to appear—waiting for the moment to draw his guns. Old Pat's hands floated just above those crazy guns in his holster, and he kept rubbing the tips of his fingers against his thumb. I showed him to Millie, and we started to laugh, and then, somehow, it seemed about the most awful thing of all. Jerry Mahoney had murdered those kids and here was his old man, gone nutty as a fruitcake."

Old Mr. Granger, in the bank, had much the same reaction when the aged, bejeweled gun toter walked up to the teller's window.

"Good morning, Mr. Granger," Pat said, cheerfully.

"Good morning, Pat."

"You're not too busy this morning, I see," Pat said.

"N-no," Mr. Granger said. The killer's father—dressed up like a kid for the circus. He's ready for a padded cell, Mr. Granger thought.

"Since you're not so busy," Pat said, "I'd like to have a look at the detailed statement of my account for the last three months." As he spoke, he turned and leaned against the counter, staring out through the plate-glass bank window at the street. His hands stayed near the guns, and he kept rubbing his fingertips against the ball of his thumb.

"You get a statement each month, Pat," Mr. Granger said.

"Just the same, I'd like to see the detailed statement for the last three months," Pat said.

"I had to humor him, I thought," Mr. Granger said later. "So I went back in the vault to get his records out of the files. Well, I was just inside the vault door when he spoke again, in the most natural way, 'If I were you, Mr. Granger,' he said, 'I'd close that vault door, and I'd stay inside, and I'd set off all the alarms I could lay my hands on. You're about to be stuck up, Mr. Granger.'

"Well, I thought it was part of his craziness," Mr. Granger said, later. "I thought he meant *he* was going to stick up the bank. I thought that was why he'd got all dressed up in that cowboy outfit. Gone back to his childhood, I thought. I was scared, because I figured he was crazy. So I *did* close the vault door. And I *did* set off the alarm, only it didn't work. I didn't know then all the electric wires into the bank had been cut."

Gertrude and Millie, the telephone operators, had a box seat for the rest of it. They saw the black sedan draw up in front of the bank and they saw the four men in dark suits and hats get out of it and start up the steps of the bank. Two of them were carrying small suitcases and two of them were carrying guns.

Then suddenly the bank doors

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

burst open and an ancient cowboy appeared, hands poised over his guns. He did a curious little jig step that brought him out in a solid square stance. The four men were so astonished at the sight of him they seemed to freeze.

"Stick 'em up, you lily-livered rats!" old Pat shouted. The guns were out of the holsters, twirling. Suddenly they belched flame, straight at the bandits.

The four men dived for safety, like men plunging off the deck of a sinking ship. One of them made the corner of the bank building. Two of them got to the safe side of the car. The fourth, trying to scramble back into the car, was caught in the line of fire.

"I shot over your heads that first time!" Pat shouted. "Move another inch and I'll blow you all to hell!" The guns twirled again and then suddenly aimed steadily at the exposed bandit. "All right, come forward and throw your guns down," Pat ordered.

The man in the direct line of fire obeyed at once. His gun bounced on the pavement a few feet from Pat and he raised his arms slowly. Pat inched his way toward the discarded gun.

The other men didn't move. And then Gertrude and Millie saw the one who had gotten around the corner of the bank slowly raise his gun and take deliberate aim at Pat. She and Millie both screamed, and it made old Pat jerk his head around. In that instant there was a roar of gunfire.

Old Pat went down, clutching at his shoulder. But so did the bandit who'd shot him and so did one of the men behind the car. Then Gertrude and Millie saw the tall figure of Mr. Haviland come around the corner of the hotel next door, a smoking gun in his hand. He must have spoken very quietly because Gertrude and Millie couldn't hear him, but whatever he said made the other bandits give up. Then they saw Liz Deering running across the street to where old Pat lay, blood dripping through the fingers that clutched at his shoulder.

Trooper Teliski's car went racing through the dugway at breakneck speed, siren shrieking. As he came to the turn-in to the old quarry, his tires screamed and he skidded in and up the rugged path, car bounding over stones, ripping through brush. Suddenly just ahead of him on the path loomed the crane from the new quarry, inching up the road on a caterpillar tractor. Trooper Teliski sprang out of his car and ran past the crane, shouting at the tractor driver.

"To hell with that!" Teliski shouted.

Stumbling and gasping for breath, he raced out into the clearing where hundreds of people waited in a grief-stricken silence for the grappling for bodies to begin.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Everybody!" Teliski shouted. "Everybody! Listen!" He was half laughing, half strangling for breath. "Your kids aren't there! They're safe! They're all safe—the kids, Jerry Mahoney, everyone! They aren't here. They'll be home before you will! Your kids—" And then he fell forward on his face, sucking in the damp, loam-scented air.

Twenty minutes later Clayton was a madhouse. People running, people driving, people hanging onto the running boards of cars and clinging to bumpers. And in the middle of the town, right opposite the bank, was a station wagon with a yellow school-bus sign on its roof, and children were spilling out of it, waving and shouting at their parents, who laughed and wept. And a handsome young Irishman with bright blue eyes was locked in a tight embrace with Elizabeth Deering.

Haviland's fingers shook slightly are he lit a cigarette. Not yet noon and he was on his second pack.

"You can't see him yet," he said to Jerry Mahoney. "The doctor's with him. In a few minutes."

"I still don't get it," Jerry said. "People thought *I* had harmed those kids?"

"You don't know what it's been like here," Liz Deering said, clinging tightly to his arm.

Jerry Mahoney turned and saw the newspaper taped over the broken front window, and his face hardened. "Try and tell me, plain and simple, about Pop," he said.

Haviland shook his head, smiling like a man still dazed. "Your Pop is an amazing man, Mr. Mahoney," he said. "His mind works in its own peculiar ways . . . The disappearance of the bus affected him differently from some others. He saw it as a magic trick, and he thought of it as a magic trick—or, rather, as *part* of a magic trick. He said it to me and I wouldn't listen. He said it is a magician's job to get you to think what he wants you to think and see what he wants you to see. The disappearance of the children, the ghastly faking of their death in the quarry—it meant one thing to your Pop, Mr. Mahoney. Someone wanted all the people in Clayton to be out of town. Why?

"There was only one good reason that remarkable Pop of yours could think of. The quarry payroll. Nearly a hundred thousand dollars in cash, and not a soul in town to protect it. Everyone would be looking for the children, and all the bandits had to do was walk in the bank and take the money. No cops, no nothing to interfere with them."

"But why didn't Pop tell you his idea?" Jerry asked.

"You still don't know what it was like here, Mr. Mahoney," Haviland said. "People thought you had done something to those kids; they imagined your Pop knew something about it. If he'd told his story,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

even to me, I think I'd have thought he was either touched in the head or covering up. So he kept still—although he did throw me a couple of hints. And suddenly, he was, to all intents and purposes, alone in the town. So he went upstairs, got dressed in those cowboy clothes, and went, calm as you please, to the bank to meet the bandits he knew must be coming. And they came."

"But why the cowboy suit?" Liz Deering asked.

"A strange and wonderful mind," Haviland said. "He thought the sight of him would be screwy enough to throw the bandits off balance. He thought if he started blasting away with his guns they might panic. They almost did."

"What I don't understand," Liz said, "is how, when he fired straight at them, he never hit anybody!"

"Those were stage guns—prop guns," Jerry said. "They only fire blanks."

Haviland nodded. "He thought he could get them to drop their own guns and then he'd have a real weapon and have the drop on them. It almost worked. But the one man who'd ducked around the corner of the building got a clean shot at him. Fortunately, I arrived at exactly the same minute, and I had them from behind."

"But how did you happen to turn up?" Jerry asked.

"I couldn't get your father out of my mind," Haviland said. "He seemed to know what was going to happen. He said they'd be searching for the kids, whether I told them to wait at home or not. Suddenly I had to know why he'd said that."

"Thank God," Jerry said. "I gather you got them to tell you where we were?"

Haviland nodded. "I'm still not clear how it worked, Jerry."

"It was as simple as pie a la mode," Jerry said. "I was about a half mile into the dugway on the home trip with the kids. We'd just passed Karl Dickler headed the other way when a big trailer truck loomed up ahead of me on the road. It was stopped, and a couple of guys were standing around the tail end of it.

"Broken down, I thought. I pulled up. All of a sudden guns were pointed at me and the kids. They didn't talk much. They just said to do as I was told. They opened the back of the big truck and rolled out a ramp. Then I was ordered to drive the station wagon right up into the body of the truck. I might have tried to make a break for it except for the kids. I drove up into the truck, they closed up the rear end, and that was that. They drove off with us—right through the main street of town here!

"Not ten minutes later," Jerry went on, "they pulled into that big deserted barn on the Haskell place. We've been shut up there ever since.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They were real decent to the kids —hot dogs, ice cream, soda.

"So we just waited there, not knowing why, but nobody hurt, and the kids not as scared as you might think," Jerry laughed. "Oh, we came out of the dugway all right—and right by everybody in town. But nobody saw us."

The doctor appeared in the doorway. "You can see him for a minute now, Jerry," he said. "I had to give him a pretty strong sedative. Dug the bullet out of his shoulder and it hurt a bit. He's sleepy—but he'll do better if he sees you, I think. Don't stay too long, though."

Jerry bounded up the stairs and into the bedroom where Pat Mahoney lay, his face very pale, his eyes half closed. Jerry knelt by the bed.

"Pop," he whispered. "You crazy old galoot!"

Pat opened his eyes. "You okay, Jerry?"

"Okay, Pop."

"And the kids?"

"Fine. Not a hair of their heads touched." Jerry reached out and covered Pat's hand with his. "Now look here, Two-Gun Mahoney . . ."

Pat grinned at him. "It was a boffo, Jerry. A real boffo."

"It sure was," Jerry said. He started to speak, but he saw that Pat was looking past him at the silver picture frame on the dresser.

"I told you it'd be all right, honey," Pat whispered. "I told you not to worry about your boy while I was around to take care of him." Then he grinned at Jerry, and his eyes closed and he was asleep.

Jerry tiptoed out of the room to find his own girl.

NEXT MONTH . . .

another ALL-STAR ISSUE—including stories by

AGATHA CHRISTIE

MICHAEL ARLEN

O. HENRY

and an exciting novelette by

CORNELL WOOLRICH

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW *short stories*
in forthcoming issues . . .

Death of an Old-Fashioned Girl	**STANLEY ELLIN**
Murder After Death	**CORNELL WOOLRICH**
a new Secret Service series	**MICHAEL GILBERT**
The Man in Seat 12	**HUGH PENTECOST**
The Persian Bedspread	**GERALD KERSH**
A Sense of Dynasty	**HOLLY ROTH**
The Washington, D.C. Murders	**PAT McGERR**
Miss Phipps Jousts with the Press	**PHYLLIS BENTLEY**
Who Would Steal a Mail Box?	**ANDREW GARVE**
The Wild Thing	**MARK VAN DOREN**
Tales of the Minerva Club	**VICTOR CANNING**
Blood Money	**AVRAM DAVIDSON**
In the Middle of Nowhere	**HUGH PENTECOST**
Why, Benny, Why?	**FREDRIC BROWN**
Withers & Malone, Crime-Busters	**STUART PALMER & CRAIG RICE**
Mink Coat, Very Cheap	**CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG**
Flair for Murder	**FRANCES & RICHARD LOCKRIDGE**

magic names, magic titles, magic stories . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INDEX TO VOLUME FORTY-ONE—JANUARY-JUNE 1963

ALBEE, G. S.: The Analytic Agent — May 79
ALLINGHAM, MARGERY: Murder Under the Mistletoe ..... — Jan. 38
BARNARD, L. G.: Fish Story .... — Feb. 107
BEHNEY, L. E.: Tales From Home — April 116
BENTLEY, PHYLLIS: Miss Phipps Discovers America ..... — March 88
BIGGLE, JR., LLOYD: Have You a Fortune in Your Attic? .... — May 120
BLOCHMAN, LAWRENCE G.: The Wolf and the Wayward Wac — May 6
BOND, R.: Only the First Reading — June 39
BOUCHER, A.: Best Mysteries .... — Jan. - June
Clue of Knave of Diamonds .. — May 26
BROWN, FREDRIC: The Assistant Murderer ..... — May 134
CANNING, VICTOR: The Carnation Anniversary ..... — Jan. 20
Through the Wall ..... — April 138
CARR, JOHN DICKSON: The Grandest Game in the World .... — March 49
CHILD, C. B.: The Holy-Day Crimes — Jan. 75
CHRISTIE, AGATHA: The Man on the Chancel Steps ..... — March 117
COXE, GEORGE HARMON: The Simplicity of the Act ..... — March 113
CURTIS, R.: Turn and Turnabout — May 90
DART, L.: Ingenious Jonathan Jones — May 24
DAVIS, DOROTHY SALISBURY: By the Scruff of the Soul ..... — Jan. 6
DEAL, BORDEN: Tough Cop ..... — June 118
DEFORD, MIRIAM ALLEN: No One Ever Suspected ..... — March 69
FAIRMAN, PAUL W.: Wally and the Country Cousin ..... — Jan. 87
The Shaken Heart ..... — June 99
FISH, ROBERT L.: Adventure of the Counterfeit Sovereign ..... — June 67
"FORBES, EDWARD": The Man Who Heard Whispers ..... — Jan. 65
GARDNER, ERLE STANLEY: The Case of the Crying Swallow . — March 6
GILBERT, MICHAEL: The Future of the Service ..... — March 29
The Catalytic Agent ..... — May 67
GORES, JOE: Darl I Luv U ..... — Feb. 109
HARRIS, H.: Concealed Evidence . — June 115
HIGHSMITH, PATRICIA: Gracious, Pleasant Life of Mrs. Afton . — Feb. 41
IVORY, MARTIN: The King of Mail Order Mystery ..... — March 105
Ripe for Plucking ..... — May 62
JACKSON, MARGE: Dear Mr. Queen, Editor ..... — April 89
JAYME, WILLIAM NORTH: I Will Please Come to Order ..... — Jan. 57
JENNINGS, GARY: Grease Job .... — June 44
KEMELMAN, H.: The Adelphi Bowl — March 133
KENDRICK, BAYNARD: A Clue from Bing Crosby ..... — Jan. 9
KING, RUFUS: The Gods, To Avenge ..... — June 7
LACY, ED: Frozen Custard Caper . — Jan. 11
LARDNER, RING: Stop Me—If You've Heard This One .... — Jan. 3
LEWIS, RICHARD O.: Falling Star — May 10
LUSTGARTEN, E.: Forbidden Fruit — Jan. 11
McGERR, PAT: Justice Has a High Price ..... — Feb.
McGIVERN, WM. P.: The Last Word ..... — Feb. 5
MACDONALD, JOHN D.: Funny the Way Things Work Out .... — April
MARX, O.: Miracle on Fifth Avenue — June 10
NIELSEN, HELEN: Death Scene .. — May 5
PENTECOST, HUGH: Delinquent Account ..... — Feb. 12
The Day the Children Vanished — June 13
PIKE, ROBERT L.: Clancy and the Cat's Eyes ..... — March 3
POST, M. D.: Dead Man's Gloves — Jan. 4
QUEEN, ELLERY: Mystery at the Library of Congress ..... — Feb. 8
REACH, ALICE SCANLAN: The Ordeal of Father Crumlish .... — April 3
ROBERTS, KENNETH L.: The Bottle Mine ..... — June 5
ROBINSON, EDWIN ARLINGTON: Two Poems ..... — Feb. 80, 8
ROTH, HOLLY: As With a Piece of Quartz ..... — April 14
SEARS, SUSAN: You Never Can Tell About People ..... — April 8
SHAFFER, CLYDE: The Day the Sheriff's Dog Died ..... — March 7
SPEED, JANE: According to Plan .. — March 8
STOUT, REX: The Zero Clue ..... — April 1
STURGEON, THEODORE: The Abominable House Guest ..... — June 13
TAYLOR, MATT: McGarry on the Warpath ..... — April 9
TOLSTOY, LEO: The Expense of Justice ..... — April 6
ULLMAN, J. M.: Happy Days Club — Feb. 3
The Boy Wonder of Real Estate — April 5
Operation Bonaparte ..... — June 2
VICKERS, ROY: The Color of Truth — June 6
WALLACE, EDGAR: The Ghost of John Holling ..... — April 4
WALTON, BRYCE: Case History .. — April 7
WELLMAN, MANLY WADE: The Richard Cory Murder Case . — Feb. 8
WIGGINTON, L.: Vengeance Is Mine — May 9
WOOLRICH, CORNELL: The Cape Triangular ..... — Feb. 1
ZIMLER, R. & M.: Home Office: 221B Baker Street ..... — Feb. 6

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

You be the judge!

The evidence is all in—in fact, you are holding it in your hands right now.

This is the bigger and better ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE. Look through it (as if you haven't already done so!). Then:

DECIDE FOR YOURSELF.

If you want EQMM to come to you every month—without interruption—take advantage of this subscription offer. You'll get

6 bumper issues for $3.00

Note: You can also order the new ELLERY QUEEN'S 1963 ANTHOLOGY, Mid-Year Edition, Volume 5. Only $1 a copy.

---

ease enter my order:

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

505 PARK AVENUE
EW YORK 22, NEW YORK

☐ 6 issues for $3 ☐ 12 issues for $6

☐ Payment Enclosed ☐ Bill Me Later

☐ Extend my present subscription.

☐ Send me _____ copies of ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY No. 5 at $1 each ($1.25 outside U.S.A.). My payment for the Anthologies is enclosed.

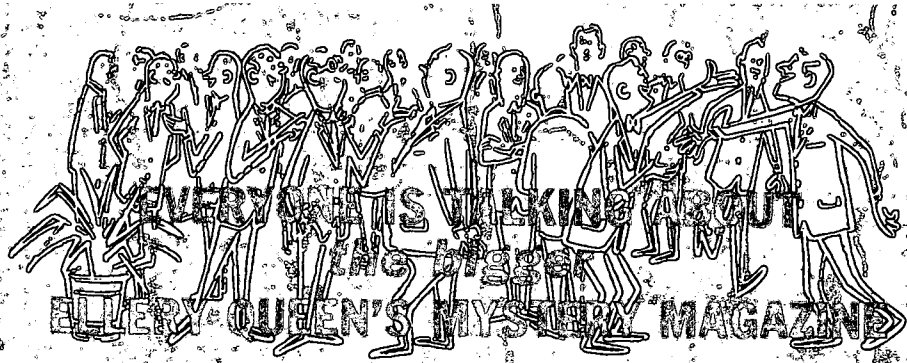
ame_____
(Please print)

ldress_____

ty_____ Zone_____ State_____

E663

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Yes, the bigger and better EQMM—bringing you the best of new detective fiction. Every new issue will have *32 extra pages* of the most exciting mystery reading you'll find anywhere.

Stories of crime and detection, tales of suspense and surprise—and even the supernatural. All this and more—every month. AND, in nearly every issue, an unusual *short novel* by a master of mystery—including such famous writers as

Erle Stanley Gardner	Rex Stout	Cornell Woolrich
Hugh Pentecost	Patrick Quentin	William Irish
Anthony Boucher	the Gordons	Kelley Roos
Victor Canning	Roy Huggins	Neil Paterson
Philip Wylie	Rufus King	Ellery Queen

See the other side of this cover page for your subscription offer.

FIRST CLASS
PERMIT No. 1050
NEW YORK, N. Y.

BUSINESS
REPLY MAIL

NO POSTAGE STAMP NECESSARY IF MAILED IN THE UNITED STATES

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

505 PARK AVE./NEW YORK 22, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED